

that time when by tiigi

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Summary:

"They gave up on her." The man says vehemently. "I won't."

This catches Bill's attention at least. That sentiment is all too familiar to him; his parents seem to have given up on everything, not just Georgie. They have no hope of getting him back anymore, and all his mother ever does is sleep and cry. He's certain they forgot today was his birthday, and he's fairly sure they didn't even notice him leaving the house.

He decides ultimately, with the sound logic of a freshly turned seventeen year old, that if this man wanted to kill him he would probably have tried to do it already. It may be worth finding a kindred spirit in him if nothing else.

Bill makes an error in judgement. It costs him everything.

1. Chapter 1

Author's Note:

hello and welcome to the worst thing I will ever write

double check the tags and proceed with caution!

A few weeks before Bill's seventeenth birthday, Georgie goes missing.

He's been planning the day for months with his friends, figuring out what bars they can sneak into and how far out of Derry they should venture. He's been looking forward to it for a long time, convinced that it's going to be the best birthday he's had so far.

Then, one day, Georgie doesn't come home, and all of Bill's plans fall by the wayside.

Bill spends his seventeenth birthday alone, down in the Derry sewers. This isn't exactly common, but it's not exactly uncommon either. It's the first time he's been in the sewers, purely because he thinks the chances of Georgie being down there are so slim that he searched everywhere else first.

Now he's running out of ideas, and he's getting desperate. His parents, along with every adult in Derry, seem perfectly content to forget about the missing kids. There are so many of them now that Bill can't even remember all of them, and he's clearly not the only one whose memory is failing him.

But he refuses to accept that Georgie is— isn't coming back. Georgie is his baby brother. It still feels like, sometimes, this is all a horrible nightmare, and that if he just focuses hard enough he'll wake up to Georgie shouting his name and asking to play.

He hates feeling so helpless. He hates the suffocating feeling of failure that chokes him every time he gives up and heads home, another day wasted and no sign of his little brother anywhere.

God, he'd give anything just to hear Georgie's voice one more time, to be able to say goodbye, and that includes wading through Derry's shitty water. He can only imagine what his friends would say if they were here. Eddie would never shut up, the constant drone of complaints would prevent him from actually finding anything–

Bill freezes when he hears a noise coming from nearby. He hasn't ventured too far into the sewers yet: the water only just laps at his ankles, seeping into his socks and the canvas of his sneakers. He could still turn and run if he needed to, and the thought gives him courage.

Part of him wants to call out, to call Georgie's name and pray that his brother answers, but he holds himself back. If it's someone dangerous then he doesn't want to draw attention to himself– he just wants to observe.

The sound comes again, closer now, a faint splashing. Bill freezes, arm braced against the tunnel wall for balance. The only light shines in from the circular entrance a few hundred yards away so Bill is mostly cast into shadow, but he's still noticeable for anyone walking around the corner.

He contemplates finding a darker place to hide or a corner to duck behind, but that would only draw more attention to himself, so he stays still and silent.

Before long the intermittent splashing becomes rhythmic footsteps echoing through the tunnel, and Bill watches as a shadowy figure rounds the corner. He observes this stranger's odd, loping gait, as though he's hurrying to get out.

When he notices Bill watching him, he slows to a halt almost immediately. They stand in tense, expectant silence.

Then, "What are you d-doing here?" Bill calls out, because he wants the upper hand of having made the first move.

The figure moves, steps closer and further into the light. Bill wills himself not to back away, not to show any fear in the face of a potential danger. Once Bill can see the stranger properly he relaxes a

little. Like most things, the person seems much less threatening in the light of day.

It's a man Bill doesn't recognise, which is rare considering everyone in Derry seems to know everyone. He has high cheekbones and dark auburn hair and looks, for all intents and purposes, perfectly ordinary. If Bill wasn't so suspicious right now he might even be admiring him.

There's a weak cough, like this might be the first time in a while the man has spoken out loud, and then his voice rings out loud and clear through the tunnel.

"Looking for someone," the man answers, and Bill's heartbeat quickens. That sounds eerily similar. "Who are you?"

Bill doesn't want to answer that question, wouldn't want anyone to know what he was up to regardless of whether they were a possible criminal or not, so he ignores the question in favour of asking his own.

"Who are you looking for?" What are the chances that someone else is looking for another missing child in exactly the same place as Bill? Can it really be a coincidence, or does this person know something Bill doesn't? Is he on the right track here?

"My niece." The man answers, taking a few stumbling steps closer and Bill startles. "Betty. Her name is Betty. Do you know her?"

Bill doesn't answer. He does know her though: Betty Ripsom was in the same grade as Bill and his friends until she went missing a couple of months ago. They had even shared a few classes, and she always seemed like a nice person. Bill wishes he'd gotten to know her.

"Her family m-moved away." Bill challenges, because it's true. It had been the town gossip at the time— her parents hadn't even been able to handle two months without their daughter. They had moved out, and the police had stopped caring and soon after Betty Ripsom was just another faded poster stuck on a crowded billboard.

"They gave up on her." The man says vehemently. "I won't."

This catches Bill's attention at least. That sentiment is all too familiar to him; his parents seem to have given up on everything, not just Georgie. They have no hope of getting him back anymore, and all his mother ever does is sleep and cry. He's certain they forgot today was his birthday, and he's fairly sure they didn't even notice him leaving the house.

He decides ultimately, with the sound logic of a freshly turned seventeen year old, that if this man wanted to kill him he would probably have tried to do it already. It may be worth finding a kindred spirit in him if nothing else.

"I'm looking for someone t-too." Bill admits tentatively, taking a hesitant step forward. The water sloshes gently around his ankles and something squelches below his foot. He winces but ignores it, focusing on the other person here with him.

The man pauses, looking up at Bill with an unreadable expression. The crease between his eyebrows quickly smooths out and he regards Bill with a sympathetic look that Bill has grown used to over the past few weeks.

"A missing kid?" The man asks. Bill nods, swallowing the lump in his throat at the mention of Georgie. A silence falls over them as Bill takes deep, steadying breaths through his mouth to avoid the awful sewage smell.

"Your friend?" The man asks, voice lilting upwards questioningly. It's not demanding or insistent, but it's also not breezy and casual like Bill has grown so used to over the past few weeks. It seems that whenever anybody talks to him now, it's with the gentle hesitance of one addressing a child. This is a refreshing change.

"My b-b-brother." He spits the word out like poison, relieved to have it out of his mouth. The back of his throat burns with the effort not to cry and he blinks furiously.

"Why down here?" The man asks. He ambles a little closer to Bill and with great obviousness slips his hands out of his pockets, instead letting them dangle harmlessly at his side. Bill appreciates the thought.

"I've looked everyw-where else." The words feel hopeless and wrong, tinged with desperation. They feel like giving up. "You?"

"I heard that kids sometimes mess around down here. I... I don't know, really. I hoped I might find something, a clue, anything..." He trails off with a sigh that Bill only hears thanks to the echoing of the tunnel. He hadn't realised he'd been slowly gravitating forwards, but when he next takes a step his foot comes down on something solid.

It startles him more than anything, which is why he jerks backwards in shock. The hand he's balancing on the wall with slips as well and then he's falling, plummeting head first into gallons of shitty Derry water.

He closes his eyes in preparation, but the shock of hitting the ground never comes. Instead, he realises, the man has leapt forwards and has wrapped a steadying hand around Bill's wrist. His hand is so large that it completely encircles Bill's skinny arm, and Bill tries not to stare.

"Sorry," The man releases him immediately. The places where his fingers had been feel hot, like he's just been branded. "I didn't- you don't wanna fall in there."

Now that they're so close Bill realises how big the man is; he's only about half a head taller than Bill, which he supposes isn't much since Bill towers above all his friends, but he has such a large presence that Bill can't help but feel small in comparison. His shoulders are broad and he stands with his back straight, posture impressive.

Bill is nothing in comparison, is a weedy, scrawny kid, and the reminder of that unsettles him.

"My friend said it's gray water." Bill murmurs, distracted looking at the man in front of him. In the dim light of the tunnel, his eyes almost seem to be glowing.

Something akin to surprise flashes across the man's face then, so quickly that Bill thinks he might have imagined it. "He's right." The man says eventually. Then, after a short pause, "I'm Robert."

“B-Bill.” Bill tells him, glad they’re not exchanging last names.

“How did you fall over, anyway?” Robert asks, taking a step back so they aren’t so close anymore. Bill is suddenly reminded of the solid object that almost brought him toppling to the ground. Whatever it is, it’s going to be gross or disturbing.

“I s-stepped on something.” He must sound as serious as he feels because Robert meets his eyes with a similar expression. Then his mouth sets in a grim, determined line, and he crouches down.

Bill watches in fascination, still confused with this new turn of events. He would have thought that if he met a stranger down in the sewers they would undoubtedly be trying to kill him, but all Robert seems to have done so far is help him.

“W-What are y-you–” Robert’s hand cuts through the water and he grimaces. Bill can’t blame him.

His hand seems to feel about for a moment and Bill feels awkward, just standing there and watching and not saying anything, but then Robert inhales sharply and pulls something out of the water.

A shoe, singular. It’s small and soaked through and absolutely filthy, and it has ‘Betty Ripsom’ written in block letters across the inside. Bill freezes.

Robert doesn’t seem to know what to do either. He doesn’t try to move or stand up properly, just stays hunched over, clutching the shoe in his hand with a frozen expression on his face.

Slowly, carefully, Bill lowers himself into a crouch as well. He extends a shaking hand and rests it on Robert’s shoulder, fingers dusting over the jacket he’s wearing. “It d-doesn’t m-mean anything.” Bill tries to reason, but his argument sounds weak to his own ears.

Robert just exhales, slow and lethargic and defeated. He turns his head slightly and levels Bill with a weak, wavering smile.

“Thanks, Bill.” He says, because they both know Bill’s words are a lie.

They both rise at the same time, seeming to come to some unspoken

agreement that they should leave. Robert holds onto the shoe, knuckles turning white. A thought occurs to Bill.

“Are you g-going to take that to the p-police?” He asks anxiously. Robert looks down at him, head tilted curiously.

“The police didn’t help find Betty. They didn’t do shit, kid.”

Bill tries not to look as relieved as he feels. He doesn’t want to risk his parents finding out he was here– they get upset when he so much as mentions Georgie, he doesn’t want to imagine how they’d be if they found out he’d been searching all over town for his missing brother.

“They didn’t do shit f-for Georgie, either.” Bill agrees.

Stepping out of the tunnel reminds Bill of stepping out of the movie theatre in the middle of the day. It’s so bright in comparison that he brings up an arm to shield his eyes, and he only vaguely notices Robert heading in the opposite direction.

“Good luck, Bill.” The man says, sparing him one last glance. Bill wonders where he’s staying: there’s nothing on that side of the river except Neibolt street, and they don’t have any hotels over there.

But he doesn’t voice any of these questions. Instead he watches Robert walk away, voice small when he says, “You too.”

Bill sees Robert a week later, as he’s walking home from the store. His parents haven’t exactly been bothered about grocery shopping since Georgie went missing, so that job has fallen to Bill. Usually he only has to ask his father for cash, but on particularly bad days he’ll sneak it out of the man’s wallet for fear of what will happen if he opens his mouth.

The trouble with shopping for three, Bill finds, is that it’s practically impossible to carry it home. He has no car and it’s a fifteen minute walk back to his house; his backpack can only carry so much and then he’s left with lugging round four plastic carrier bags of food and trying his hardest to make sure nothing falls out.

That's what he's trying to do when he next sees Robert— only he's failing, because no sooner has he left the store than one of the straps is snapping and food is tumbling to the floor.

"Shit," Bill curses, fumbling with the others as he tries to gather it all together. He's just glad it wasn't the bag with the eggs in it.

As he's scrambling around on his knees, Bill becomes aware of someone nearing him, their footsteps heavy on the tarmac ground. He looks up in time to see Robert, kneeling down to retrieve an apple that had rolled away.

"Billy?" He smiles in recognition, and something in Bill flutters. He doesn't even bother telling Robert that he hates being called Billy, has done ever since Georgie—

"Robert," He blows his fringe out of his eyes and hopes he isn't too red faced. "Hi."

"Having some trouble?" Robert draws closer to where Billy is kneeling and helps pick up a few stray items, placing them carefully back into the bag. "Want some help?"

"Oh," Bill can feel his stammer coming on, nerves sitting heavy and suffocating in his chest. "It's n-not that f-far a walk. Thanks though"

"Here," Robert says, easing Bill's hand away from the bag gently. Bill hadn't even realised how hard he'd been gripping the broken straps, hard enough to have his nails digging into his own skin. "At least let me do this."

His fingers work so quickly that Bill barely sees what he does. Five seconds later he's guiding the bag back into Bill's open hand, this time with the straps tied together in a tight, efficient knot.

"Were you a b-boy scout or s-something?" Bill tries to joke. He ignores the flicker of pride that lights up when Robert's mouth stretches into a grin. He really is undeniably handsome.

"Not quite," Robert answers smoothly, voice deep and rich with humour. "My father used to take me out to hunt. He'd get me to

make snares.”

“Ah,” Bill answers. The thought of hunting for fun has always made him a little uneasy. He just doesn’t see what’s enjoyable about killing a defenceless animal, but he can’t really judge Robert for something his father made him do.

Robert seems to sense Bill’s hesitation because he sighs and stands up straight again. “He wasn’t the nicest man.” He tells Bill. He hadn’t even noticed Robert had a couple of Bill’s bags in his hands, but when Bill starts to walk Robert follows him.

“I’m s-sorry.” He answers truthfully. He doesn’t know the extent of Robert’s relationship with his father, but he’s learnt a little about how difficult it can be over the last few weeks.

“Not your fault, kiddo.” Robert grins and reaches out as though to ruffle Bill’s hair. He must decide against it, because he lets his hand drop to Bill’s shoulder and keeps it there for a moment, a solid weight. Bill deliberately holds himself very still, eyes focused on the sidewalk.

“Seventeen.” He mutters, scuffing the toe of his sneaker against the floor.

“Hmm?” Robert hums questioningly.

“I’m s-seventeen.” Bill repeats, a little too embarrassed to specify his point. Saying it out loud feels childish, like he’s admitting to being a kid.

He can feel Robert’s gaze on him and he fights the urge to shiver. It’s strange, he’s never craved attention from anybody before, and yet here he is, blushing just because a good looking man is paying him attention.

“You’re very mature for your age, Billy.” Robert says suddenly, voice low with a hidden meaning that Bill can’t figure out. His breath catches on his throat.

“Thanks.” He murmurs, slowing to a stop.

"This you?" Robert jerks his head towards the house they've stopped in front of.

"Yeah," Bill responds, hoping none of his nosy neighbours are watching through the curtains. Then again, he doubts his parents would care much, even if he was spotted with an older man from out of town.

"Thanks for the h-help." Bill says, hands shaking as he reaches out to get his bags back. Robert's fingertips brush over Bill's knuckles: they're callused and warm, and Bill bites his cheek.

"No worries." Robert replies. "See you round, Billy."

Before he can properly walk away, Bill plucks up the courage to call after him, without a clear picture in his mind of what he wants to say.

"R-Robert, wait." Thankfully he doesn't have to raise his voice too much. Robert turns and regards him with an encouraging smile. "Did you- I mean, have y-you f-found..."

Bill doesn't know how to finish that question but Robert must know what he means, must take pity on him, because he smiles sympathetically and shakes his head. "I haven't gone back there." He tells Bill, sounding a little sheepish. "I want to, but I just... can't."

Scared of what he might find, Bill figures. It's understandable.

That Saturday it's pouring with rain. Bill is caught in the downpour on his way home, the soles of his shoes smacking against the slippery concrete. He wishes he'd thought to bring an umbrella, or even a raincoat.

As it is he's soaked through, t-shirt sticking to his skin, fringe plastered to his forehead. It's biting cold outside and he's shivering, arms wrapped around himself and teeth chattering uncontrollably. He's in the worst state to run into anyone, so of course that's exactly what happens.

He's about two blocks away from his house when he sees Robert rounding the corner and heading up towards him. The man has an umbrella stretched out over his head, and of course he's dressed in a sensible black raincoat. When he sees Bill standing there, watching him and looking like a drowned rat, he frowns.

"Billy," he calls, voice carrying over the distance. The single word sounds reprimanding. "What are you doing out here? You must be freezing. Jeez, get under here."

Bill doesn't actually have to move anywhere; before he can, Robert is sidling up to him and moving the umbrella so Bill isn't exposed anymore. It's a relief, but Bill can't relax because all of a sudden Robert is pressed up close against his side. He feels his cheeks heat up and hopes his blush isn't too noticeable.

"What are you doing out?" Robert asks again. Bill is reluctant to answer - his stutter is bad enough as it is, he can only imagine how unintelligible he'll be when he's shivering so much - but he doesn't want to ignore Robert.

"W-Went for a w-walk. Got c-caught in the r-rain." Bill answers, practically monosyllabic.

"Jeez, Billy." Robert whistles, reaching around Bill unexpectedly to rub at his bare arm. Goosebumps pop up on Bill's skin and he bites his cheek so hard he tastes sharp copper.

"How ab-bout you?" Bill asks, if only to take the attention away from himself.

"I went back to the sewer." Robert explains. Bill swallows, but Robert continues before he can ask. "I didn't find anything. When it started raining, I thought I could wait it out but it wasn't stopping."

Bill hums in agreement. They walk for a few minutes in silence, and Bill notices how they're automatically walking in the direction of his house.

"How've you been?" Robert asks, breaking the silence between them. He doesn't say anything else, but Bill is glad of that. When people

usually ask him this question, they always lead with something. *How are you– with Georgie and everything? How are you, how're things with your parents?*

“Alright.” Bill bites his bottom lip. “Weird. It’s l-lonely in the house without G-Georgie.”

Robert’s hand slides from Bill’s arm to rest on his shoulder comfortingly. He squeezes once, grip teetering on the edge of too hard, but it’s a grounding feeling. It makes Bill feel less like he could just float away right now.

“It must be awful.” Robert sighs. “I don’t think I realised how loud Betty was until she was gone.”

Bill frowns. He doesn't remember Betty ever being particularly lively, but maybe she was different at home than at school.

Bill almost doesn’t realise they’re standing outside his house now, rain cascading around them. He takes half a step back and perches on the step up to his door.

“D-Do you wanna come in f-for a bit?” Bill asks nervously. He’d feel bad sending Robert out into the wind and rain, especially after the man just went out of his way to get Bill home safely.

An expression crosses Robert’s face that Bill can’t identify– he doesn’t think he’s ever seen anything like it before, and it only lasts a second before he’s smiling, slowly and gently. He reaches out and Bill stays deliberately still as Robert’s thumb swipes across his cheek, brushing a raindrop away.

“I wouldn’t want anyone to get the wrong idea, kiddo.” He murmurs, voice low. “Besides, your dad will be back from work soon. I ought to go.”

Bill stands, frozen from the rain but red hot from having Robert’s fingertips brushing his cheek, touching his face. Robert regards him with a bemused look before reaching into his pocket and pulling out a pen.

“Here,” He smiles, teeth razor sharp and dazzling white. He takes

Bill's wrist in his hand and holds him as he presses the nib of the pen into Bill's skin, thumbnail just slightly pressing into the bone. "Here's my number. Call me whenever. I'll always be around if you want to talk, okay Billy?"

Bill can't think of a single thing to say to that, so he just watches as Robert waggles three fingers to say goodbye and takes off in the same direction they'd just come from. Bill supposes it's natural to assume someone might be working Saturday afternoon, and besides, it's Derry. Robert probably knows all about his family by now from some gossiping neighbour.

He shrugs it off and goes back inside, hurrying into the shower and turning the heat up high to get the chill out of his bones.

It isn't until much, much later that Bill thinks to question why Robert had an umbrella with him if it only started raining after he'd left.

2. Chapter 2

Notes for the Chapter:

thank you so much for all the comments on the last chapter! <33

Another child goes missing, and the first thing Bill wants to do is call Robert.

Well, the first thing he wants to do is curl up and cry and pray to god that this is all a horrible nightmare he's going to wake up from, but then he reaches for his phone and takes in a shuddering breath.

Robert's number has been sitting in his phone for a little under a week now, but he's been too busy to go outside other than for school. He kept wanting to call Robert, wanting to meet him. They could go out, search for any more clues of what happened to the missing kids. They could find something– they could–

They couldn't, because Bill never called. Fear and embarrassment mixed together in a dizzying cocktail that he couldn't escape from, and before he knows it there's another missing child and he hasn't spoken to Robert once.

Now he can't stop himself. He can't talk to his parents about this; his mother hasn't left her room in three days and his father will get the same stony look in his eye that he gets whenever Bill tries to bring up Georgie. He's burdened his friends with enough of his trauma over the past few weeks.

But Robert... Robert will get it. Robert will *understand him*.

So he picks up his phone before he can stop himself and finds Robert's number, fingers anxiously tapping out a message. He doesn't really know what he wants to say.

Eventually, he just sends '*Did you hear?*' And waits in anxious anticipation for a response. After a few minutes he lets out a long sigh and heads downstairs, cheeks burning in humiliation. Sure, there

are lots of explanations for why Robert might not have replied, but for Bill the only logical answer is that he doesn't want anything to do with Bill.

Of course he doesn't. Why would he want the burden of babysitting a fucked up, traumatised teenager? Bill should never have texted him.

He's halfway through preparing a microwave meal for his mother when he hears his phone ping and feels it buzz in his pocket. He hurries to get the ready meal on a plate and slides into a chair, pulling out his phone.

'I did. Do you want to talk about it?'

'I wouldn't know what to say.' Bill texts back honestly, hands shaking. Immediately the three dots pop up and Bill waits for a response all over again.

'In person then?'

Bill bites his bottom lip. Isn't this what he wanted? It'll be harder in person to get his words out thanks to his nerves and his fucking stammer, but talking through messages just feels cold and impersonal.

That's what this is about, he realises. That's what he wants. He's not searching for answers or explanations from Robert– he's looking for support that he can't seem to find from anyone else, no matter how much he craves it, and he can only get that if he sees the man in person.

'Would that be okay?' Bill types back, hesitating before sending another message quickly after. *'I probably won't be able to leave the house tonight– does tomorrow work?'*

Robert doesn't make him wait long. *'Tomorrow sounds good. Midday back at the barrens?'*

Bill sends off a quick affirmative message, thanking him and wishing him a good night, before sliding his phone back into his pocket and resting his forehead on the table. He wants to leave Derry. He wants to move away from his parents, away from their constant state of

depression and disappointment. He wants this nightmare to be over.

He's distracted by the sound of the door clicking open and shut, and he jerks his head up before he can be taken by surprise. His father's figure looms intimidatingly in the doorway.

He sits down opposite Bill and draws the plate with the meal on it towards him, starting to eat without even saying hello.

"That was for m-mom." Bill says quietly. He sounds sad and tired, nothing like how he used to be.

His father looks at him for a moment, fork frozen halfway to his mouth. His eyes flash with something that might be anger or realisation or regret, but it's gone in a second. He continues eating.

"Then make her another one." He says through a mouthful of mashed potato. Bill does.

Robert is already waiting for him when Bill shows up the next day. It's a nice day for once; the sun seems obnoxiously warm as Bill cuts his way through bracken and mud towards their meeting point. He's wearing his sneakers again - the only pair of shoes he owns now, since his trainers broke - and his summer outfit.

Knee length shorts and a t-shirt seem inappropriate now he thinks about it, both for the occasion and the situation. A child is missing, and Bill is going to meet Robert. He wants to seem sophisticated, and instead he's made himself seem like even more of a kid.

When he finally shows up, sweat is prickling the back of his neck and he's almost out of breath. Robert looks cool as ever, calm and relaxed. He stands to greet Bill with an easy smile, not at all affected by the hot weather.

"Hiya, Billy." The nickname has Bill blushing, but he doubts Robert will be able to see it through the heat flush on his cheeks. He grimaces as Bill comes closer.

"Jeez, kid, did you walk all the way here? Why didn't you cycle?" He

laughs, reaching out and running his fingers through Billy's fringe where it's sticking to his forehead with sweat. His fingers are rough and cool against Bill's skin and Bill can't help but lean in, just a little. When Robert pulls away, Bill's fringe is sticking up in every direction

He's too distracted by the unexpected touch to ask how Robert knows he cycles.

"I didn't w-want my parent t-to see me leave. Taking the b-bike would have b-been too obvious." Robert winces in commiseration and takes a seat on the rocky bank again, leaving space for Bill to sit next to him.

"Are you okay?" Robert asks in a soft, needling tone.

His friends ask him this all the time– they ask him this in excess, Bill thinks, but Robert isn't like his other friends. His parents never ask him this, and it's not like he sees Robert like he sees his parents, but...

It's hard to explain. Robert is older, but not too old to understand the way things work in Bill's world. He's from out of town, he's never met Bill's parents, he doesn't have any preconceived notion of who Bill is. Things are just *easier* with him.

"I don't even know," he lets himself say, exhaling.

Robert is silent for a moment. The sun beats down on them both and they watch the way it reflects in the stream, the way the water dances over the rocks. Slowly, like he's experimenting and he's not sure how it'll turn out, Robert raises an arm and brings it down over Bill's shoulders.

Bill freezes on the initial touch, but relaxes almost straight away. He hasn't been hugged in so long and he finds himself craving the contact, so it seems natural when he sighs and rests his head on Robert's shoulder

"Tell me about Georgie." Robert suggests. Bill's eyes flutter shut. He feels so comfortable here: it's so warm and soft and he's so tired. In some distant part of his mind Bill knows he shouldn't let this carry

on. He replays Robert saying, "I wouldn't want anyone to get the wrong idea, kiddo."

Then he pushes the memory from his mind and instead replays Robert wiping the rain from Bill's face, brushing his fingers through Bill's hair, wrapping his arm around Bill's shoulder and tugging him close.

"I l-loved him." Bill chokes out, and the tears start to flow. He isn't even thinking as he speaks. "I loved him. He was my brother. It should have been me, and n-now I can't even say goodbye. It k-kills me to know that the person who did this to him is out there, walking around. It could have been anyone. I could have seen them out in the street- I could have f-fucking smiled at them, and I'd never even *know*."

Robert lets him vent, listening but not trying to reply to any of it. Bill appreciates that; he doesn't think there's anything Robert could say that could make it better.

When he's pulled himself together a little - enough to dry his eyes and wipe the back of his hand across his face, red with embarrassment - he looks up at Robert. He finds the man watching him right back, gaze intense, and it's disconcerting to think that might have been watching Bill throughout his breakdown.

"How about you?" He asks, sniffing loudly. "Do you w-wanna tell me about B-Betty?"

Robert smiles slowly, nails scratching over Bill's scalp comfortingly. "Maybe another time, buddy." He says.

They sit there for a while, until it starts to get cold and dark and Bill realises he should have been home hours ago.

After that, they talk a lot. It's like a dam has been broken- Bill no longer hesitates to send Robert a quick message or call him if the man isn't busy. There's still the same lingering feeling of anxious excitement whenever he has to wait more than five minutes for

Robert to reply, but slowly he becomes more and more confident.

Robert is a calming presence, somewhere he can go to escape the stress of his daily life. His parents don't care enough to ask about Bill's life, and if his friends notice he's spending less and less time with him they must put it down to Georgie's disappearance.

They don't talk about Betty a lot, which Bill tries to understand. He wants to respect Robert's decision because he knows how difficult losing someone is, and how different people deal with grief in different ways. He doesn't want to drive Robert away until they have the same tenuous connection that Bill has with his parents.

They talk about Georgie, though. Robert encourages Bill to talk about him, says it will help bring closure. He talks about how much he misses him and little things that happen each day that Bill wishes he was here for. Robert listens with a half smile and a hand around Bill's shoulder.

It feels different when they speak over the phone. Bill is usually in his bed lying down, because Robert only ever seems to be free to call in the evening. He'll bunk down under the covers and press his phone to his ear, and Robert's voice will sound low and quiet in his ear.

Bill feels flushed and warm just thinking about it.

The next time both his parents are out - his father accompanying his mother to a doctor's appointment - he invites Robert over. He knows they won't be back for another couple of hours and it's raining outside, so they can't really meet up. He wants to *see* Robert; as much as he loves hearing the man's voice, nothing compares to seeing him in person.

So he sends him a quick, simple message to invite him over. He doesn't expect Robert will actually take him up on the offer; Bill has asked him a couple of times since the first occasion, and each time Robert has given him the same sort of answer. He has to be going, he has somewhere to be, he wouldn't want to give people the wrong idea.

Bill wonders what the wrong idea actually is.

This time, though, he doesn't say any of that. To Bill's surprise, a message comes through a few minutes later with a smiley face and a declaration that he would be there in twenty minutes.

Bill doesn't even have a moment to snicker at Robert's use of emoticons before he's overcome with panic. His house is a tip: his room is littered with dirty laundry and the kitchen sink is overflowing with used dishes. They probably don't have any food in the house either. Why did he think this was a good idea?

There isn't much he can do to fix the state of their house in twenty minutes, but Bill tries. He kicks stray clothes and torn up magazines under the sofa, leaves some of the dishes to soak and then embarks on his own room.

Admittedly, it's not as messy as the rest of the house. All he has time to do is pack a few of his clothes back into his drawers before he's hearing a knock at the door, and Robert is here.

"Heya, buddy." He greets, a smile splitting his face in two. Bill ushers him inside and shuts the door quickly, eager to have Robert away from the prying eyes of his next door neighbour.

It's weird, having Robert in his house, like having two worlds collide. Robert's eyes slide across the messy rooms and the stacked pile of plates, but he doesn't look judgemental or disgusted. Instead he turns to Bill with another warm smile and says, "Do you wanna show me your room?"

Having Robert in his room is even stranger, but in a different way. It feels intimate somehow; Bill has had various friends over who have seen his room, even slept in it before, but none of them have ever been like Robert.

Robert has to stoop to fit under the doorframe. His presence takes up the whole room.

"This is nice, Billy." He tells Bill, sitting on the bed without being prompted. Bill sits next to him and curls his hands over his knees just for something to do.

“What, my r-room?” Bill asks doubtfully, voice lilting up towards the end. Robert smiles.

“That too,” he murmurs, watching Bill intensely. Bill blushes.

“I’m sorry.” He says. “I d-don’t know why I asked you to c-come.”

To his surprise, Robert’s hand settles over his own where it’s resting on his knee. Bill tenses up when Robert’s hand slides a little further up, fingers teasing his thigh under the hem of his shorts. Bill’s skin tingles wherever Robert touches him.

“It’s okay to just want company.” He says, voice low and comforting. “I’m guessing you don’t get a lot of that from your parents, huh kiddo?”

From anyone else it might sound cruel, but Robert just sounds concerned and friendly. His touch is so soft and feather light on Bill’s thigh and they’re sitting so close together that Bill can’t help it; it feels like a natural progression for him to turn his head just slightly and brush his lips against Robert’s.

Except he can’t, because before he can do that Robert reaches up with his other hand and places a single finger over Bill’s lips.

“Billy,” he breathes.

He doesn’t move away, though, just stays close looking into Bill’s eyes like he’s looking for something in particular. Then, without warning, he ducks his head to the crook of Bill’s neck and inhales.

Bill doesn’t know what the fuck is going on, but it feels gritty and sexual in a way that he hasn’t experienced before. He can feel himself growing hard, cock pressing against the restrictive layer of his underwear, and he has no doubt that Robert will be able to see it any second. His cheeks burn with humiliation.

“Robert, w-what–” Bill tries, but then Robert is pulling away with a smile and shushing him gently.

“Don’t worry about that, buddy.” He says perkily, like he hadn’t just been feeling Bill up. His hand is still on Bill’s thigh. “Why don’t you

tell me about your week?”

Bill, too baffled and turned on and embarrassed for anything else, does.

Bill gets the message a few days later. It's been a stressful week and he's strung out, anxious about schoolwork and his home life and, of course, not having found Georgie. He just wants to go home, get into bed and call Robert.

The text he gets, however, sets his heart racing, and not in the way it usually does.

‘Billy, I’ve found something. Can you meet me?’

He holds the phone so close to his face that the words start to blur and the letters float around in front of his eyes. A spark of an emotion he can't quite place lances its way through his heart and he sits bold upright, breath coming faster now. He can't tell whether he's fear, excitement or dread he's feeling, or a combination of all three.

‘What?’ He types quickly, fingers fumbling in haste.

‘You’ve got to see it for yourself. You remember Neibolt house?’ The reply comes in after only a few seconds. Bill bites his lip hesitantly.

Of course he remembers Neibolt house— everyone remembers that place. Richie, Eddie and Stan used to dare him to go inside and check it out all the time, but none of them ever actually dared to do it. It's been abandoned for years. What the hell was Robert doing there in the first place, and what could he possibly have found?

It's dark outside, a few street lamps flickering on and off where they're dotted around the neighbourhood. It's just gone eleven— most places in town will be closed, and most people will be in bed. Can't this wait until morning?

His thoughts are interrupted by his phone pinging again, and he's reminded that he hasn't yet answered Robert's text.

'Billy?' Is all it says, and Bill flushes, reminded of the way Robert had said his name the other day. He'd breathed the word against Bill's lips– they had been so close, close enough to...

'I'll be there soon.' He sends, strengthening his resolve. His parents are asleep or passed out drunk, and he'll easily be able to sneak out of the front door. That's much better than having to climb out the window, because it would be at least a half hour walk to Neibolt, and he'd much rather cycle.

It's far too cold to be outside in pyjamas but Bill's heart feels like it's beating out of his chest and his fingers are trembling. He's hot and cold at the same time, and in his panic induced state the last thing he's thinking about is changing into something a little more weather appropriate.

He makes it past the front door easily and retrieves his bike from the back garden, letting the wind nip at his bare skin as he cycles the way to Neibolt. What if Robert found the missing kids? What if he found Georgie? No, Bill thinks, he'd have told Bill straight away.

Unless it was Georgie's body he found...

Bill swallows and picks up the pace.

He makes it to Neibolt in just over fifteen minutes; by the time the old house comes into view with Robert sitting on the curb right outside, he's out of breath and red in the face. Robert stands up when he sees Bill.

"What are you wearing?" Is the first thing he asks, giving Bill a conspicuous once over. Bill flushes with embarrassment: he's dressed in loose fitting flannel pants and a short sleeved pyjama top.

"I d-didn't have time to change– it doesn't matter. What did you f-find?" Bill brushes the question off, if only for his own dignity. Robert looks him over searchingly before reaching out and curling his fingers around Bill's shoulder. His grip is warm and heavy. Bill shivers.

"This way," Robert murmurs. Bill only realises then that the door to

Neibolt house is open– was Robert in there before Bill came? What was he doing there? “It’s in here.”

For the first time, something like unease begins to unfurl in Bill’s stomach. He takes a hesitant step, guided by Robert’s firm hand on his shoulder, and glances back at his bike where it lies abandoned on the sidewalk. The wheels are still spinning, slowing to a stop.

Surprisingly, the house is not as decrepit on the inside as it looks on the outside; the wallpaper is still peeling and stained with damp patches, the floorboards still creak when they take a step and there’s so much dust floating in the air that Bill sneezes, but it isn’t completely awful.

There’s a table in the corner that looks relatively clean, and a sofa that looks relatively new and, most importantly, isn’t crawling with spiders. Bill frowns– why would the house be well kept unless someone was living here?

“Robert...” Bill starts, words quiet, reluctant. “I d-don’t know about this. Couldn’t we c-come back tomorrow m-morning?”

He has school tomorrow morning, but he’d happily skip a day if it meant he didn’t have to crawl around the house of his nightmares in the pitch black.

Robert just hums under his breath; his other hand settles over Bill’s head and grips a handful of Bill’s hair. He doesn’t pull or hold too tight, it doesn’t hurt at all, but it’s such a strange gesture that Bill almost stumbles. Robert is literally leading him around the house with one hand on his shoulder and the other in his hair.

He can’t decide if it’s arousing or terrifying.

“W-Where are we g-going?” He whispers, voice catching on a few words. Bill’s back is pressed almost flush against Robert’s front and the man feels so warm, heat practically radiating off him. Bill’s mind goes blank. He *lets* himself be led around by the hair.

“The basement.” Robert answers simply. “It’s down there. You have to see it, Billy.”

The basement door makes a cacophony of noise as Robert pushes it open, taking a hand away from Bill's shoulder to do so. When it's open, he hooks his forearm around Bill's chest.

"Robert..." Bill's voice breaks on the single word as anxiety sits on his chest like a solid weight, tangible and crushing. His hands come up to grip Robert's forearm, though he's not sure whether it's for comfort or to try and pry his arm away. Robert feels so much taller, so much stronger, than ever before.

"You've gotta see it, buddy." Robert breathes, lips pressed to Bill's ear. A tear slips down Bill's cheek.

"I w-wanna go h-home." He hiccups, paralysed with fear. That's all he has time to do before a hand is covering his mouth and pressing down hard until it feels like he can't breathe, until bright lights flash behind his eyes, until his head starts pounding and everything goes fuzzy grey around the edges.

Until everything fades to black.

3. Chapter 3

When Bill wakes up, he's tied to a bed.

He panics initially, tugging at the bindings around his wrist, but he figures out pretty quickly that there's no chance he can escape. The knot is too tight, wound between his wrists and his fingers in an intricate design before it loops around the bed frame.

Slowly, with great effort, Bill sits up; he can just about manage it if he slides the rope up the metal frame, but it leaves his shoulders wrenched backwards at an awkward angle.

His feet scramble at the bottom of the bed and he tries to pull his knees towards his chest, desperately wanting to make himself smaller. He must be in the basement, and as Bill looks around his sense of dread grows stronger: this place looks like it has someone living in it. This isn't somewhere random, somewhere someone has tied him up for the time being.

Bill feels like he's waiting for someone to come back.

The bed he's on is shoved into the corner of the room. Opposite him, a heavy metal door closes him in; a bulb hangs over his head, giving off a dull orange glow around the room, and there's a bookshelf with the top two shelves full. Other than that the room is fairly empty.

"Hello?" He falls out, his voice echoing off the blank walls. He has no idea how long he's been down here but already he can feel his shoulders aching. "Is anyone th-there? R-Robert?" Panic grows steadily in his voice and he's worried he'll work himself up to a panic attack if he doesn't slow his breathing.

Suddenly there's a noise from the floor above him, and Bill's chest shudders on a terrified exhale. Footsteps creak ominously across the floorboards and Bill tracks the movement with bated breath, eyes wide and horrified.

He swears his heart stops when the sound falls silent right outside the door. Then the door clicks as a key turns in the lock and, with an

awful creaking groan, swings slowly open.

Robert stands in the doorway, leaning on the doorframe. For a second, Bill doesn't understand.

"Robert!" He cries, tears gathering in his eyes and threatening to spill over his cheeks. There's a lump in his throat that stings every time he swallows. "Help m-me. I d-don't know w-what happened but we've g-got to get out of here. Hurry, Robert, *p-please*."

His words are tinged with desperation. Bill doesn't want to accept it but he knows, deep down, that Robert isn't going to help.

"Relax, buddy." Robert smiles, walking leisurely towards the bed. It's so casually threatening that Bill thinks he's about to throw up—Robert is so tall and he seems to take up the whole room. Bill scrambles backwards up the bed, fingers scrabbling helplessly at the ropes to no avail.

"W-What—" Bill stumbles over his words, voice embarrassingly soft and confused.

"Hey, hey," Robert takes a seat on the edge of the bed and reaches out, running a hand over Bill's cheek, brushing his fingers through Bill's hair. Bill flinches. "Shh, Billy. Relax."

A tear slips down Bill's cheek and Robert coos, rubbing the pad of his thumb over the tear.

"Don't cry, kiddo. We're friends, remember?"

"This isn't h-happening." Bill breathes to himself, squeezing his eyes shut. He doesn't want to start hyperventilating because that will give him an even worse disadvantage. How can this be real? How can Robert - his *friend*, the person he's spent the last few weeks trusting and confiding in - be *this person*?

How can he be the person who killed Georgie?

"Look at me, buddy." Robert hums, voice almost melodic. He seems far too pleased about what's happening, far too excited. He's sick, Bill realises with a sudden, crushing terror. He keeps his eyes shut tightly.

Robert doesn't like this, evidently. He digs his fingernails sharply into Bill's cheeks as he grips his face, and when he speaks next Bill feels Robert's breath brushing over his mouth.

"Open your eyes." He hisses. Bill's eyes flutter open instinctually and he's met with Robert's face, closer than it's ever been. He's confronted suddenly with the memory of the other day in his bedroom; Bill had been so close to kissing him, had *wanted* to, had wanted to feel Robert's mouth against his own.

His stomach lurches.

"There you go, good boy." Robert grins. He looks insane. Has this part of him been there all along and Bill was just too blind in his adoration to notice it, or has everything he thought he knew about the man been a lie?

There are so many things that Bill wants to say to that, and even though he knows his voice will fail him, that his words will be frail and weak, there's only one thing he can think to ask right now.

"Did you k-kill Georgie?"

Robert sighs like Bill is a pesky kid asking him an annoying question. His fingers follow the slope of Bill's temple over the tip of his nose down to rest heavily on his bottom lip. Bill is too afraid to object.

"C'mon, Billy." He says playfully, thumbing his lip. "Do you really need me to answer that?"

Bill feels it like a punch to his stomach; his eyes squeeze tightly shut and he hunches over, letting out a noise like a wounded animal. He's going to throw up. For weeks he was walking around with Robert, talking to him, resting his head on Robert's fucking shoulder, and all that time he'd had no clue that he was becoming friends with the man who'd murdered his brother.

"You asked m-me to t-talk about him." Bill whispers, tears glittering in his eyelashes. "You m-made me talk a-about how much I *m-missed* him."

Robert *laughs*.

“Don’t be mad, kiddo.” Robert pinches his cheek. It’s so casual, so *demeaning*, that Bill feels a bright spark of anger and before he can properly think it through he’s lashing out. His foot connects with Robert’s stomach and the man makes a quiet, pained sound.

It’s a futile effort because there’s no way to escape his bindings; the only thing his anger really serves to do is piss Robert off, and he stumbles away a few steps to catch his breath. Bill glares up at him with tears in his eyes, bottom lip trembling, fear and rage battling for his attention.

He wants to turn back time to yesterday, back when everything was okay and Robert was someone he could trust. Even with his parents in the state they are, he’d do anything to go back there to that hostile environment. It would be better than being locked up in the basement of a creepy house with a serial killer Bill had let touch him up.

“Really, Bill,” Robert says, voice stern. It’s the first time he’s called Bill ‘Bill’ since he met him, and fear wins out. “That wasn’t very nice.”

Robert reaches out and wraps his fingers around Bill’s skinny ankle, yanking him down the bed with ease. Bill yelps at the sudden unexpected action and the pain of Robert’s fingers pressing into his bone.

“Get *off* m-me!” Bill cries, wincing as his skin chafes against the rope.

“I’m trying to be nice here, Billy,” Robert says, voice stretched thin with anger. “But you’re really testing my patience.”

Bill is flat on his back within seconds, arms contorted painfully above his head with his legs spread. He’s still wearing his ridiculous pyjama bottoms, a soft cotton fabric that he feels horribly exposed in, but ultimately he supposes it’s better than not waking up in them.

Robert is kneeling on the bed, fingers still curled threateningly around Bill’s ankle whilst his other hand is balanced against the mattress next to Bill’s hip, supporting his weight. He looks feral when he looks up at Bill, eyes wild and glittering with a dangerous spark

Bill has never seen before.

He's terrifying, and Bill opens his mouth to speak before he knows what he's going to say. "Y-You're not really B-Betty's uncle, are y-you?"

Robert watches him silently for a moment before his lips curl upwards and he snickers, a low, rumbling noise that Bill would have found endearing yesterday. Now it's just horrifying.

"Everything I said about her was true, Billy." Robert tells him. His fingers tease at the skin under Bill's pyjama bottoms, scratching his nails softly over the skin. It would feel comforting if his hand wasn't slowly creeping higher. "I told you her family gave up on her- that was true. I told you she was loud, and she was. She was loud when she screamed."

Bill lets out a shuddering sob that wracks his body, chest hitching when he tries to draw in a breath. "You d-didn't tell me y-you k-killed her." He whispers.

Robert's hand slips further up until he's cupping Bill's calf, his touch causing goosebumps to pop up for a multitude of reasons that Bill doesn't want to examine. "I never told you I didn't." He replies.

Then he's drawing back, scraping his nails against Bill's skin as he withdraws his hand from Bill's pyjamas and leaving an uncomfortable chill behind him.

"I'll be back later tonight with some food." Robert tells him, straightening his clothes and dusting himself off. "I'm sorry I can't stay, but I've got big plans in the works!"

Bill watches him blankly, not sure whether he should feel better or worse about the fact that he's going to be alone. He's terrified with Robert around, unsure what the man is going to do next. He's undeniably unsafe with a crazy guy in the room with him, but there's a small part of his mind that still remembers Robert as his friend.

This is *crazy*- Bill is still holding out the tiniest sliver of hope that all of this has been some horrible dream that he's about to wake up

from. Robert is his *friend*; Robert wrapped an arm around Bill's shoulder as he cried, Robert comforted him about all the shitty things his parents did. Robert almost *kissed* him. How can this be happening?

"I know this all looks pretty drab right now," Robert gestures around him with a long-suffering sigh. "But you won't be here for long."

Bill blinks up at him. "W-What?"

"I've been working on something, buddy. It needs a little more time but it should be ready soon, then we can get you out of this stuffy room. I think you'll like it- I've been getting it ready for you for a while now."

Bill's stomach churns, but it's even worse when Robert moves as though to leave.

"R-Robert, wait." Bill cries weakly. He's still laying flat on his back in the bed, and it makes him feel vulnerable. "Could y-you untie my h-hands? P-Please? It h-hurts."

Robert winces sympathetically and pats Bill's cheek twice; Bill fights the instinct to flinch. "Not yet, kiddo. Not yet."

Bill doesn't think he'll be able to sleep: having his arms tied behind him leaves him completely exposed and vulnerable, and the thought of Robert being around him like that when he's unconscious makes him feel nauseous. It's not like that wasn't the situation before, after Robert must have knocked him out, but he can't willingly submit himself to that again.

Even so, he finds himself blinking sleep out of his eyes with a sense of lethargic heaviness that indicates he's been asleep for a few hours. There's no way of telling what time it is, trapped underground without windows as he is; it was around midnight when he arrived at Neibolt, but Bill has no clue how long he had been unconscious for.

It's no lighter or darker than it was before. Bill's arms have started to

ache from being contorted over his head for so long and he can tell his body is just beginning to feel hungry. Soon he's going to have to ask Robert for help, or accept what Robert gives him, and he doesn't want to do either of those things.

He can't believe this is real. He can't believe he didn't see it coming. How the fuck could he not suspect a man walking round the *sewers*, no matter what shitty excuse he gave? Why did he believe Robert's sob story without thinking to check it? Why didn't he see the signs that Robert was a lying, manipulative piece of shit before this ever happened?

Bill messed up every stage of the way, and now, this kind of feels like his own fault.

He doesn't have to wait long for Robert to show up, but he still doesn't know whether that's a good or bad thing. Bill hears footsteps above his head before anything else, fast paced and light, like Robert barely even touches the ground. Then the smell of oil and fried food reaches him; Bill finds it incredible that a house like this could have a functioning stove, but he didn't exactly get to see much of it before he arrived.

Bill manages to push himself upwards into a sitting position before Robert is cranking a heavy set lock on the other side of the door and stepping inside. He beams when he sees Bill already awake and the smile splits his face in half. He looks dangerous, like a wild animal with deadly sharp teeth.

"You're awake! Good morning, Billy." He doesn't bother closing the door behind him and Bill strains his neck to look around Robert. All that's visible is a set of wooden, rickety looking stairs in a dark corridor. Robert must see him looking, because he frowns and sidesteps into Bill's line of sight.

"Did you sleep well? You looked so cute earlier, I didn't want to wake you." Bill, mildly horrified at the implication that Robert was watching him sleep, tries not to show any emotion.

"I hope you're hungry," Robert continues when it becomes clear that Bill isn't going to reply. "I made breakfast. I thought since it's your

first morning here we should celebrate in some way, make it extra memorable. Don't get used to it, mind– I can't be bringing you breakfast in bed every day, but you handled everything last night really well so I think you deserve it this one time, don't you?"

Bill opens and closes his mouth a few times, searching for a reply, but none comes. Robert isn't carrying a tray and it doesn't look like he has fried eggs stuffed into his pockets, so Bill concludes that he won't actually be getting breakfast in bed. That's good. That means he'll have an opportunity to get out of this basement and into the rest of the house, where he can look for anything that might help him escape.

It had been too dark last night to see much of anything, but hopefully it'll be easier now.

"Come on then, kiddo, lean forward." Robert approaches the bed without caution, not seeming to care when Bill flinches away from him. When he pulls out a knife, the blade only about as long as his thumb, Bill doesn't even have time to panic; Robert places a hand between Bill's shoulder blades and urges him forward, cutting the rope that ties Bill to the bed so that his wrists are still bound together but he's free to sit up properly.

Robert hauls him upwards with a hand under each armpit; at first, Bill's arms feel so heavy and numb that he panics, stumbling a few paces and only staying upright thanks to the vice like grip Robert has on him. When it's clear he's going to be able to walk on his own, Robert moves one hand to grip a handful of Bill's hair, keeping it so that if he moves too far away, pained tears spring to his eyes.

He stays close to Robert as the man leads him up the stairs.

The kitchen, when Bill finally gets to see it, looks like a tip. It's hard to believe that Robert was able to make food in here; Bill had thought his own kitchen at home was bad but this is way worse. There are incriminating stains on the floor and the worksurface is more grime than wood. Despite all this, there are two chairs drawn up to the precarious looking table with two plates of food in front of them.

“You’ll have to excuse the mess,” he laughs self deprecatingly, like he hasn’t kidnapped Bill. “It’s been such a long time since I had people stay over.”

“D-Do you...” Bill swallows as he gathers the courage to speak. “Live h-here?”

Robert laughs, still with his fingers wound tightly into Bill’s hair. “Oh, no, I don’t live here. I live somewhere much nicer than this, buddy. You’ll see it soon– I’ll take you there. You’ll like it.”

Robert manhandles Bill into one of the chairs as he speaks, reaching over to the sideboard to grab a coil of rope he must have left there. Bill watches in confusion and growing panic as he crouches down by Bill’s feet and manoeuvres his legs further apart.

Bill’s eyes are drawn to the knife that lies at the side of his plate right in front of him as Robert starts to wrap the rope around his ankles and the chair leg. He could reach out right now and stab Robert in the neck. His hands are tied but if he was quick and silent, if he didn’t draw his actions to Robert’s attention, he could do it well enough to make a run for the exit.

Of course, Robert wouldn’t be killed by one blow with a blunt butter knife, and it would only work if the door was actually unlocked. If he tried and failed, Bill can only imagine how much worse things could get for him.

As though he’s sensing the boy’s thoughts, Robert starts to speak.

“I saw your friend in town earlier.” Robert says conversationally, looping the rope around the other ankle now, and Bill’s blood turns to ice. “What is it– Richie? Yeah, Richie. He’s got quite the mouth on him, hasn’t he.”

“S-Stay away from h-him. Stay away f-from my f-friends.” Bill threatens, although his voice sounds frail and feeble even to his own ears. “If you h-hurt them, I s-swear to God, I’ll–”

“What?” Robert asks. He isn’t shouting, but his voice is sharp and sudden, and Bill swallows nervously when his exclamation is

followed by the man getting to his feet. He looms over Bill, dragging the backs of his fingers over Bill's cheek almost reverently.

"You'll what, Billy?" He continues, eyes dragging pointedly over the rope that's tying Bill's hands together and his feet to the chair. He's completely helpless, and any threat he makes right now will obviously be empty. "What will you do?"

"I'll k-kill you." He says anyway, chin tilted upwards defiantly. Robert just laughs, and Bill feels about two feet tall.

"No, I don't think you would, kiddo." Robert tells him, voice eerily soft. "I don't think you could kill me. I don't think you could kill anyone, but especially not your *best friend*. That's what I am, right, Billy? That's how you see me?"

"F-Fuck you. N-No." Bill stammers, cheeks glowing red with humiliation.

"Aw, don't be like that, buddy. You don't have to be embarrassed about it. I get it- mommy and daddy didn't pay you attention, then along I came. I paid attention to you, didn't I. I listened to you. You let me touch you."

Robert grips Bill's chin between his thumb and his forefinger, thumbing at Bill's bottom lip. "No, I don't think you could kill me. You wanna know what I think, Billy? I think you *like* me."

Bill rears backwards, disgusted by how accurate Robert's words actually are. There's a part of him that does still like Robert, that can't rationalise the man he used to know with the man who's holding him prisoner. There's a part of him that knows, if it came down to it, he could never kill anyone.

"Eat your breakfast, Billy." Robert says. His mouth is still stretched in an exaggerated smile, but his eyes look different now, more dangerous. "Before I change my mind."

Bill doesn't want to argue with that.

4. Chapter 4

Notes for the Chapter:

thank you for all the kind comments and all the support you guys have shown this fic! <3

this chapter gets a little more nsfw so take care when reading :)

After he's finished eating, Robert uses the same knife to cut through the ropes around Bill's feet. Bill can feel the smooth metal, cold against his skin, and he silently hopes that Robert isn't looking to deliberately hurt him.

The food was admittedly good, and it's been so long since anyone actually made breakfast for him that Bill finishes it all in five minutes. It's almost embarrassing, especially when Bill notices Robert watching him with an uncomfortably fond expression on his face, but there are worse things that could happen. He tries not to let his fear show.

Robert keeps the rope tied around one ankle but cuts Bill loose from the chair so that he can hold him securely as he guides him through a short tunnel. There's a bathroom on the other side of the door and half of Bill wants to let out a sigh of relief whilst the other half tenses up. He'd been worried that Robert would leave him to piss himself, but is that really any worse than having the man watch him take a piss?

He tries to get it over with as quickly as possible but he takes his time washing up. Fresh water is a relief and he splashed some on his face before he lets Robert tug him away, stumbling and stuttering, back towards the basement.

Bill's heart thunders against his rib cage as they descend the stairs to the basement. His bed comes into view and, when Robert doesn't immediately shut the door behind them, Bill is filled with an almost tangible desperation to get the fuck out of there. He knows Robert will plan on tying up his hands again, but he'll probably also want to

untie the rope from around his ankle.

If Bill lashes out at exactly the right time, he might have a shot of getting up the stairs and to the door before Robert can catch him. Robert had caught him off guard earlier with that mention of Bill's friends, the thinly veiled threat an obvious attempt to keep him well behaved, but if he can get out of here then he can tell people the truth and he won't be putting anyone in danger.

He doesn't want to think about what he's risking if anything goes wrong.

Bill waits until Robert is distracted by unwinding a coil of rope before he strikes, bringing his arm back sharply and elbowing Robert's face. He makes contact with something and Robert makes a soft, surprised noise, but Bill doesn't have time to pay attention to that. He dashes madly for the stairs—

And makes it about three feet before his ankle is yanked backwards—Robert must have stepped on the rope as it dragged across the floor —and he hurtles face first towards the concrete floor. He manages to catch himself before he hits the ground, grazing his palms painfully, and then he's being hauled upwards by his hair. Bill shouts out in pain.

“Get off m-me!” He screams, fingernails scratching uselessly at Robert's hands. He's picked up easily and flung onto the bed like a ragdoll; Robert starts to crawl up the bed and Bill panics, kicking Robert wildly in the face. His bare foot probably doesn't do much damage, but it does seem to make Robert angrier.

He lashes out, backhanding Bill across the face so sharply that tears spring to his eyes straight away and his ears ring. One of Robert's big hands encloses over his throat and squeezes until Bill's vision goes blurry, until he feels like his windpipe is being crushed. He isn't even aware that his arms have been yanked above his head until Robert takes his hand away from Bill's throat and he can actually think again.

He sucks in desperate lungfuls of air, grateful for each one. He acknowledges distantly that his hands have been tied up again but

he's too hazy to struggle, still trying to convince himself he isn't going to die.

When he's finally conscious enough to take in his surroundings he sees that Robert is still straddling his chest, probably why he was finding it so difficult to breathe. The man looks angry.

"What did I say," he leans in, far too close for comfort. "About testing my fucking patience, Billy?"

Nothing, he wants to say. *You didn't tell me shit.*

Instead, he opens his mouth to apologise but all that comes out is a hoarse, broken whisper. Robert scoffs and climbs off him, looking over Bill's bed with his hands on his hips like he's reprimanding a misbehaving child.

"I'm really disappointed in you, Billy." He says, and then he leaves.

It isn't long before Bill hears the groaning of the door being unlocked and opened, and he raises his head off the pillow in time to see Robert shutting them both in again. His heart sinks when he sees Robert's bloody lip and the bruise blossoming on his jaw, convinced that he's about to meet a grisly end now, but when Robert turns to look at him he's smiling.

His wrists are still stinging from where the rope has chafed them and his throat is already sore from where Robert's hand had closed around it, but Bill gets the absurd inclination to apologise for hurting Robert. It can't be normal to feel bad for attacking your captor, but Robert was Bill's friend before he became his kidnapper. Looking at the bruise on Robert's face that he caused is like looking into any one of his friends' faces and seeing pain that he put there. It leaves him feeling unsettled and guilty.

"There we go, Billy." Robert is saying as he approaches the bed. Bill watches him soundlessly, eyes tracking his movements. "We're not gonna get into another fight, are we buddy? You're not gonna cause anymore trouble, are you?"

When Bill realises Robert is actually looking for a response he swallows nervously and shakes his head, hesitant. “N-No.” He whispers, wanting to curl into himself. “I’m s-sorry.”

A pleased smile spreads over Robert’s face, and Bill is disgusted with himself when he recognises the flare of pride that it kickstarts in him. Robert pats Bill’s knee and heads over to the bookshelf, deliberating carefully before taking something into his hands. Bill can’t see the title, but he’s more confused than curious.

“I know this must be boring for you, kiddo.” Robert starts, sitting on the edge of Bill’s bed and watching him with an eerie smile. Bill gets distracted by Robert’s thumb, rubbing circles over the cracked spine of the book.

“I really am sorry about that.” He continues. “Things will be more interesting when we get to our proper home, I promise. It’s almost ready, Billy.”

There’s a lot there that Bill doesn’t have the strength to unpack. He could ask about where this new home is, or when they’ll be going, or why it is that Robert wants to take him there. He doesn’t. Instead, he asks the question he’s been wanting an answer to since he got here.

“Why me?” There must be something in his voice, something weary and downtrodden, because Robert tilts his head and watches him consideringly.

“What?” He asks.

“Why me?” Bill repeats. “Was it just cause you m-met me? In the s-sewers? Or...”

Robert sighs. “I understand that this is all very confusing for you, Billy, but you’re doing such a good job. You’re trying so hard for me. *That’s* why, buddy. You try so hard. You’re so *interesting*, and I was so *bored*. Killing people gets boring, Billy, especially when it’s all the same. Crying and pleading and screaming and bleeding and eventually they’re just dead. But you... if I killed you, Billy...”

He reaches out and traces the bruises around Bill’s neck that must

already be forming.

“I don’t think you’d scream.”

There’s a beat of silence in which Bill tries to keep himself from throwing up. Then he says, “You’re a psychopath.” But there’s no bite behind it.

“Don’t name call, Billy.” Robert smiles. “It’s not nice.”

Then he starts to read. It’s actually quite nice, being read to– he used to do it for Georgie all the time, to get him to fall asleep, but his parents were never big on reading to him when he was a kid. Bill feels his eyelids droop: Robert’s voice is low and oddly comforting in place of stifling silence.

He’s so lost in his own thoughts that it takes Bill a moment to realise Robert has stopped talking. Bill hadn’t been particularly invested in the book he was reading, but after so many hours on his own Robert’s voice becomes a comforting drone in the background. After what feels like a two day long adrenaline spike, the crash has finally arrived and it’s easier than Bill would have thought it’d be to let himself be pulled into an almost doze.

Then he feels Robert’s hand on his ankle, and he realises that comforting background drone has fallen silent. He flinches instinctively but forces himself not to move, not to struggle. It’ll only be worse if he tries to get it to stop. Besides, his hands are tied over his head and kicking could only keep Robert off him for so long. There’s no point in prolonging the inevitable.

“You sleepy, Billy?” Robert asks, closing the book loudly. His hand slides further up Bill’s leg and, even though the fabric of Bill’s pyjama bottoms is preventing it from being skin on skin contact, it still feels like Robert’s hand is branding him.

Bill is afraid of what will happen if he doesn’t reply, so he ends up saying, “A little,” in a small voice and holding his breath as Robert climbs up onto the bed. He crawls up over Bill’s body until his knees are either side of Bill’s hips and their faces are only a few inches apart.

“Hmm,” Robert hums under his breath, and that’s all the warning Bill gets before Robert is kissing him.

Bill has never been kissed before, so in all fairness his reaction is understandable. Robert’s lips move against his own and he freezes, eyes wide and terrified whilst his mouth stays resolutely shut. Robert is attractive and Bill is an inexperienced, horny teenager, but if this is kissing then Bill doesn’t know what the big deal is. It’s wet and messy and it doesn’t feel good at all.

Then, without warning, Robert lets out a little growl of frustration against Bill’s lips. He guesses lying deadly still is not a turn on for Robert, although it would make perfect sense all things considered.

He hears a rustling noise and notices out of the corner of his eye that Robert is now only balanced with one palm flat against the bed, but he doesn’t really pay this any mind until Robert’s other hand reaches down between their bodies and settles over Bill’s clothed cock.

Bill’s whole body jolts– he’s never been kissed before, let alone had his dick touched by anyone other than himself. His lips part in a startled gasp and Robert takes advantage of that, uses the moment to slip his tongue inside Bill’s mouth and stroke it over Bill’s own tongue.

He doesn’t remove his hand from Bill’s cock, and he can feel himself growing hard. Shame and arousal colour his cheeks pink.

“Please– don’t–” Bill tries to say when Robert finally moves away, but his voice breaks and he has no idea what he really wants to say.

Robert just watches him for a moment, their noses touching. Robert’s eyes have always seemed so big, so expressive. Before now Bill would have described them as sincere, but now he doesn’t think he can use that word. Even so, looking so intently into Robert’s eyes feels hypnotic, especially with the taste of the man’s tongue in his mouth and his hand still on Bill’s cock.

When he whispers his next words, Bill can feel Robert’s breath ghost over his lips, still damp with Robert’s saliva.

“I think you’re going to really like it here, Billy. You and me– we’re going to have fun.”

And then he leaves. Bill takes a moment to get his breathing under control, because it feels like his heart is beating fast enough to send him spiralling into a panic attack. His lips feel numb and tingly, his cheeks warm. His dick is still hard, tenting his pyjama bottoms a little; his wrists are bound to the bed and he hates more than anything that he wishes he could touch himself, just bring himself off so he could get to sleep and escape consciousness for a little bit.

Bill wonders if he’s only thinking this because it’s entirely impossible and, if his hands were untied, he’d be too uncomfortable to jerk off. Probably– whilst having Robert grope him without his consent was something Bill had never imagined himself having to deal with it, having Robert catch him masturbating *because* of the groping would somehow be far more embarrassing.

There’s nothing else for Bill to do but lie there and wait until his erection has flagged before he can get some sleep. Robert must have slipped something into his drink because there’s no way Bill is naturally this tired; it can only have been an hour or two since he woke up.

He shudders at the sudden, painful knowledge of how much power Robert has over him. He could have killed Bill so many times by now. He could have slipped some slow acting poison into Bill’s food that could be killing him right now and he’d have no idea he was dying until he was dead.

He doesn’t think so, though. Why would Robert... do *that* to him if he didn’t intend to go further? Why would Robert make such a big thing of having a ‘forever home’ for him and Bill to move into if he was just going to kill him beforehand?

It’s worrying, Bill thinks, that he’s started relying on Robert’s psychotic behaviour as an indicator of his safety. How long before he becomes dependent? Bill doesn’t even think he’d know if it had already happened.

He inhales slowly and lets his eyes flutter shut. His limbs feel heavy

and leaden again, and thankfully his crisis has caused his dick to go soft. Bill stretches his legs out and wiggles his fingers, worried that a lack of circulation will lead to a world of pain tomorrow.

For now, though, he closes his eyes. When he dreams, he dreams of Robert's eyes, bright in the darkness of the basement, watching him sleep from the corner of the room.

5. Chapter 5

Time passes, but Bill has no way of knowing how long he's been here or what time of day it is. He drifts in and out of a hazy sleep at random intervals, and when he's awake all he can do is stare at the walls and think about what his old life used to be like. Robert is with him often, but there's no rhyme or rhythm to his visits, and though he knows he shouldn't Bill finds himself looking forward to them.

Robert is the only other human interaction he has– Bill has come to look forward to seeing the man, being read to or talked at. Robert hasn't groped him since the first time, but occasionally he'll stroke Bill's hair or brush his fingers over Bill's lips. Bill doesn't know how to feel about the fact that he looks forward to this as well, that he leans into the contact and savours it. Realistically he knows it's only because he hasn't been touched in so long - even before Robert kidnapped him - but it's difficult not to feel disgusted with himself.

That's why, when he wakes up to find Robert sitting on the edge of his bed with his hand splayed side over Bill's thigh, he's surprised but not as scared as he probably should be.

He blinks the sleep from his eyes slowly, drawn into consciousness by the pressure snaking up his leg, the sharp sting of fingernails digging into his skin. He jolts when he realises how close Robert is; he has to lean backwards a little for the man's features to be in focus and even then he has to squint a little. His heart thumps painfully in his chest and his breath catches in his throat– having his breath mix with Robert's feels uncomfortably intimate, regardless of how intimate they've been already.

"Robert?" He mumbles, moving to rub his fist across his eyes before remembering his hands are tied. The rope pinches his skin and he winces, feeling the hair on the back of his neck prickle under Robert's watchful gaze.

"Hiya, Billy." Robert says in a sing song voice, seeming far too happy. Bill wonders if the man is going to read to him again or if he'll make another attempt at conversation; the last time that happened Bill hadn't been very receptive and Robert had ended up pinching the

skin around his neck and collarbone until angry red marks blossomed on his skin.

“How are you feeling tonight?” Robert asks next. He runs a finger down Bill’s temple over his cheek to rest on his bottom lip, and he looks frustratingly handsome when he smiles. Bill swallows nervously, a little fixated on ‘tonight’. Either it really is night time - and that’s the first indication of time Bill has had since he arrived here - or Robert is messing with his mind even more than he already has.

“G-Good, thank you.” Bill replies. He’s learnt from experience that this is what Robert wants him to say, and besides, he’ll find out what the hell is going on a lot sooner if he plays along.

“Mmm, I’m glad to hear that.” Robert smiles again. Bill jerks against the restraints as Robert swings his leg over Bill’s body and settles, hands splayed wide over his pectorals for balance or his own pleasure. “I have some good news.” Robert continues, his smile turning a little manic around his eyes.

Bill can’t explain the way hope unfurls in his chest, so he doesn’t try to.

“Our new home is ready, kiddo.” Robert’s thumb brushes over Bill’s nipple and Bill whimpers, feels it hardening under his pyjama shirt. He knows Robert can feel it too, know he’s probably getting off over the thought that he can bring this sort of reaction to Bill’s body. Despite knowing this, he can’t seem to get his body on the same wavelength and when Robert’s nails scratch lightly at the skin of his stomach, just under his shirt, he keeps his mouth shut.

“It’ve been getting it ready for you, Billy.” Robert tells him sincerely. His hands travel further and further up under Bill’s shirt until the fabric is bunched up around his neck; he rubs his thumbs in tight circles over Bill’s nipples again and again until Bill is twitching with oversensitivity, and when he speaks he sounds distracted. “I just know you’re gonna love it.”

“Are w-we going tonight?” Bill asks, struggling to keep his voice even. He doesn’t know what to be hopeful for anymore, when

everything has been monotonous and disappointing for so long.

“Why wait any longer?” Robert scratches a nail over Bill’s nipple and he gasps, digs his nails into the palm of his hand to keep from cringing away in pain. “I’ve got everything there ready, I just need to get you ready and then we can go.”

“Get me ready?” Bill repeats dubiously. It’s hard not to sound just a little fearful when talking to Robert, but he can’t deny that he’s mostly excited. He’s going to be getting out of this horrible, dank room, away from the sound of dripping water and the cold that always seems to hang over him like a stifling mist. If Robert wants him to brush his teeth or wash his hair before they can leave, he’ll do that without complaint. Bill is pretty sure just lying in the same position for so long has given him bed sores.

“Yeah,” Robert confirms, voice dropping to a low murmur again. “We want a fresh start, don’t we?” He digs his fingernails into the skin around Bill’s ribs when he doesn’t reply. “Don’t we?”

“Uh h-huh.” Bill nods, bottom lip trembling.

“Exactly.” Robert relaxes as soon as Bill does what he wants. It’s this sort of conditioning that has him feeling more and more comfortable with Robert every time he visits, Bill thinks to himself. “This is gonna be your new home, Bill! We can’t have you arriving in these old dirty clothes, can we?”

Bill’s heart sinks. “N-No.” he agrees, though everything in him is screaming not to.

Robert smiles at him then, and it’s so soft and so genuine, so reminiscent of the friendship they used to have that it calms Bill so that he doesn’t kick out when Robert’s hands slide down to the waistband of his pyjama bottoms. He wants to remind himself that the friendship they had was never real - it never meant anything - but it’s so hard to do that when this is the first soothing human contact he’s had in ages and he wants to cry from how good it feels.

“Exactly,” Robert says again. He removes Bill’s pyjama bottoms slowly, easing them off first one foot and then the next, and Bill is

left almost completely naked and restrained in front of the man who killed his brother. This man was also, coincidentally, his first proper kiss, and the first ever person to touch his dick. Just thinking about it has Bill's neck and chest flushing with shame and arousal, and he knows if he bothers to look down Robert will be watching the way his dick is starting to harden.

"It's been a while, huh?" Robert coos sympathetically, running a finger lightly over the head of Bill's cock, so sensitive that the touch brings tears to his eyes. Robert's right- it *has* been weeks since he's been able to come, and whilst it obviously hadn't been his main priority since being kidnapped it's something he now can't get his mind off.

Bill lets the first tear fall when Robert finally wraps a hand around him and gives him one full, slow, teasing stroke. His mouth falls open and he lets out the most embarrassing noise he's ever made, but Robert seems to like it because he giggles softly and thumbs at the head of Bill's cock where precome is gathering, shiny and wet.

"You're so cute, Billy." Robert says, almost as if he's talking to himself. "So cute. How could I keep my hands off you?"

Each stroke feels incredible; Robert's hands are warm and calloused at the fingertips and are so, so big that his fist almost envelops Bill's length entirely. He needs more - faster, tighter, anything - and the slow pace Robert has set up is torturous with Bill as on edge as he is. He's seventeen and he hasn't jerked off in weeks- his body is ready to blow instantly.

But then Robert is smirking and running the tip of his tongue over his lips and shuffling down the bed, taking his hand off Bill's dick in order to do so. Robert's touch was heady and intense, and so as soon as that contact is gone Bill feels dizzy, like his head is spinning. He's far too confused to understand what's happening or what Robert is about to do. He only figures it out when he feels something warm and soft and wet rub back and forth over the tip of his cock.

"*F-Fuck!*" Bill cries out, high pitched and needy. His feet are scrambling against the mattress, legs spread whorishly so that Robert can fit in between them as he wraps his lips around the head of Bill's

cock and sinks down. Bill sobs. There's no way to describe this- it's a feeling so intensely *good* that Bill can barely breathe, let alone think or speak. Fat tears roll down his cheeks and clump in his eyelashes as shudders wrack his frame.

Robert's tongue slides over his shaft and it feels velvety and incredible. It isn't just the pleasure which has Bill crying and helpless - although that is a big part of it - but it's the general human contact as well. Robert's hands are all over him, rubbing over his stomach and his hips and his thighs; he feels so close to Robert and the troubling thing is that it doesn't even disgust him. He just wants *more*: more contact, more attention, more anything.

"Fuck, oh my god," Bill breathes, hips bucking. Robert lays his forearm flat over Bill's stomach to pin him down to the mattress whilst his other hand curls around Bill's hip and, shit, even that is *hot*. These things should repel Bill and instead they make him harder.

Robert pulls off just enough to speak and keeps his bottom lip, damp and shiny with saliva, rubbing against Bill's sensitive skin. "Is little Billy gonna come?" He asks in a high pitched, teasing voice, but Bill can't tell if Robert is taunting him or not. All he can do is desperately nod and pant into his own shoulder.

"Go on, kiddo, it's okay. I've got you, you can do it." Bill really doesn't know whether he wants Robert to shut up or keep talking. The words are making him feel a little nauseous but in some ways he thinks it would be infinitely worse if Robert was completely silent as he raped Bill.

Is that what's happening right now? Is Bill being raped? The thought just makes him cry harder.

Then Robert says, "C'mon Billy, sweetheart." And Bill can't hold back anymore. His hips try to lift off the bed when he comes but Robert holds him down with his arm a steady weight across Bill's stomach. His orgasm rips through him, so intense it's almost painful, and in the back of his mind he's faintly aware of how fucking creepy Robert is being, saying, " yes, yes, yes," under his breath as he strokes Bill through it.

When it's over Bill just feels drained and exhausted. He takes a moment to watch Robert wiping come off his hand onto the bed covers. Then he bursts into tears. Robert strokes his back as he cries, running his fingers up and down the knobs of Bill's spine until he drifts into a state of half consciousness.

Bill dozes dreamily, eyes fluttering open and shut and his mind wonderfully blank for one. Even though he just woke up the force of his orgasm has him drifting back to sleep, and he has to keep scratching his palms to wake himself up. In no time at all Robert is back in the room with him, wielding a knife once again; this time though Bill doesn't feel afraid in that he doesn't really feel anything at all.

Robert slices through the bindings easily. Bill cries out when his arms are free and struggles to move them on his own but Robert helps him into a sitting position, guiding him up with a hand splayed wide over the small of Bill's back. Bill's head lolls onto Robert's shoulder and as much as he shouldn't want to, he thinks he could fall asleep like this. The only distraction comes when Robert thumbs the tip of Bill's nose.

"Hmm?" Bill moans sleepily, burrowing further into the warmth of Robert's body. When he looks up he sees Robert holding a tall glass of water and he watches as the man pulls a small, circular pull out of his pocket and drops it inside. It dissolves quickly, colouring the water white for a brief moment before it's all gone.

"W-What's that?" Bill asks, a little more alert now. Robert notices his sudden panic and smiles, tucking Bill's hair behind his ears.

"There's a car waiting outside, Billy," He starts, voice deceptively gentle. "I'm gonna take you to your new home, remember? But first I need you to be fast asleep, so I can trust you. Okay, buddy?"

Bill only takes a second to consider his options. Realistically, Robert could have put anything in his drink and Bill would have no way of knowing, but is he really any safer not drinking it than drinking it? Either he refuses and risks the consequences that come with angering Robert or he drinks it and resigns himself to staying a captive for even longer. There's no good outcome here.

“Okay,” Bill responds miserably, holding his hand out for the glass. Robert just laughs a little like he’s done something funny and uses his other hand to tilt Bill’s head back, bringing the glass to his lips. Thankfully, Robert is considerate enough to let him breathe in between sips but he doesn’t stop until all the water is gone, and with it, whatever he put in it.

Robert guides him into a horizontal position until Bill’s head is resting in his lap. It’s quite nice, being lulled into sleep with the warmth of another body right next to you, and even though it’s unconventional Bill finds his body relaxing. Robert hums something low and calming until his eyes flutter shut and his mind finally quietens down.

When Bill comes to, he has no idea how much time has passed. It’s even darker than being in the basement, and more eerie as well because every so often the light flickering around him and shadows dance on the walls. Bill’s one saving grace, however, is that he’s no longer tied up, and whilst he’s still been laid out across a bed with blankets tucked up around his neck, his face is cushioned on his hands. For the first time in what feels like centuries, Bill is free.

Only sort of, of course, because he still has no clue where he is. He manoeuvres himself into an upright position, propping himself up against the headboard, and looks around. There are a few dim electric bulbs dotted here and there but most of the light comes from candles which have been lit at seemingly random places around the room— although, now he’s paying attention, Bill can see that it’s not actually a room at all. It’s on open space, the walls and the floor and the ceiling all made of the same dark stone so that it almost seems like a cave. Other than the bed there are a few scattered ornaments: a long, rectangular table that Bill recognised from Neibolt is a few metres away. There’s a bookshelf nearby and a small chest of drawers, and a little further on there’s a rusty stove and a freezer box.

On his other side, there’s a toilet and a bathtub that might have been elegant fifty years ago, but now just looks grimy and disgusting. Bill has no clue where he is, but he doesn’t know how it took Robert so long to ‘prepare’ it when it just looks like a disassembled house.

There's an old fashioned radio on the table playing a crackling, fifties style song. Robert, who Bill now notices is sitting in one of the chairs, taps his foot along to the tune.

Looking around, Bill realises that they seem to be in the centre of a set of tunnels where they all must connect in the middle, because there are six or seven exits all around him in a circle. He could risk taking one of them and hoping desperately that it leads somewhere, but the chances are it would have a maze like design and he'd get lost trying to navigate. Robert would undoubtedly find Bill before Bill found an exit, so he stays where he is and coughs awkwardly to get Robert's attention.

"You're awake!" Robert cries happily. When he pushes back the chair it screeches against the floor and Bill winces; Robert doesn't pay it any mind though, and in a few strides he's climbing into the bed along with Bill. This, Bill realises with a dawning sense of dread, is a double bed.

"What do you think, kiddo? Do you love it?" Robert sounds genuinely excited for a response, but Bill just doesn't have it in him to play pretend right now.

"It's- it's..." Bill trails off, looking around once again. He could set Robert on fire, but he'd still have no idea which way to go or how to get out of here- and does he really have it in him to kill someone? Especially someone who used to be his friend?

"Isn't it just?" Robert grins, mistaking his speechlessness for enthusiasm. "Oh Billy, you're going to be so happy here. Here, look, I bought you these."

Robert bends down to retrieve something from the floor, and Bill almost cries when he sees it's a plastic bag from a shop he recognises. It feels sometimes like he might as well be on a different planet, but the reminder that he's still in Derry, the normalcy of it all, has him near tears.

"Here," Robert reaches into the bag and pulls out a pack of pencils: the expensive art ones that his parents never bought him. Next is a sketchbook with thick, resilient pages and after that a few hardback

books which look old and impressive. Bill recognises the names of a few, remembering them as classics that they always offered in the school library, but others are entirely unfamiliar.

“I know how bored you must get, sitting around all day waiting for me.” Robert licks his thumb and rubs at something on Bill’s cheek attentively. “And I don’t want you to be bored here, Billy, really I don’t. I want you to like it here. I went to all this trouble, just for you. You do like it here, don’t you Billy?”

Looking around, Bill doesn’t know what to say. In his mind there are two Roberts: the man who murdered his baby brother and countless other children, and the man who became his friend. That’s the Robert he’s seeing now, the one who paid attention to his hobbies and put effort into buying him things he thought Bill would like. And Bill does like them– he wants to try out the pens and see if he can still draw like he used to. He wants to read the books and get lost in another imaginary world.

Bill is reminded then of something Robert said earlier– about how Robert paid attention to him when no one else did. Is that not true? Robert has done more for him just now than his parents have in years. God, they gave up on Georgie so easily. Is anyone even looking for him anymore?

“Y-Yeah,” Bill looks from the items on the bed to Robert’s smiling, hopeful albeit slightly psychotic face. He reaches out cautiously, curling his hand into a fist around Robert’s fingers. “Yes. Th-Thank you, Robert.”

Robert smiles. Bill smiles back.

“Aren’t you going to tie me up?” Bill asks shyly, rolling one of the pencils between his fingers. Robert shakes his head and presses an unexpected, chaste kiss to Bill’s lips. Bill leans back, wide eyed and shocked.

“Not here, Billy.” He answers happily. “That’s why we came here, remember? So you could enjoy yourself, so you could be happier.” He gets up and starts to walk back towards the table, but stops mid stride, meeting Bill’s eyes over his shoulder. “Besides,” He continues.

“You’d never survive down here without me.”

Notes for the Chapter:

hey, I just started another billwise fic so check that out if you’re interested!! <3

6. Chapter 6

Notes for the Chapter:

me: murder husbands is just not plausible in this fic

also me: yes but *what if*

Bill gets used to it. He doesn't have days and nights anymore- time bleeds together until Bill works by his own schedule. He figures that he's underground and has no way of telling the time- the radio only plays the same few songs on repeat like Robert has rigged it somehow, so that doesn't offer him any help.

Robert is home a lot more often now, so Bill can't even look around properly. As much as Robert encourages him to 'explore' - and he does, all the time - Bill doesn't think he's really allowed to go further than the entrance to each of the tunnels.

Despite this, having Robert around twenty four seven isn't all bad. The first time he sleeps in the bed with Bill, Bill lies rigid and afraid for hours before he can relax. He keeps expecting Robert to make a move, to grope him or try to attack him, but Robert just nuzzles his face into the nape of Bill's neck and wraps an arm tight around his stomach. Bill hasn't slept next to anyone in years, and never like this. It's almost nice.

They cook together as well, because other than read and draw and try to write - if nothing else, this experience has done wonders for his creativity - there isn't much to do down here. Bill rarely sees him leave or return, but somehow there's always food around. Bill usually only eats when Robert is around though he isn't sure why; maybe he still fears punishment, even for the things Robert has said he can do.

Bill knows how to cook. He's been doing it for himself for months, ever since his parents stopped caring, but cooking with Robert is like cooking with a child. Bill is always hesitant to correct him or tell him what to do in case it rubs him the wrong way, but he requires pretty much constant supervision and step by step instructions. Even for something simple like chopping potatoes - which he always does,

because he doesn't trust Bill with a knife apparently - Bill has to hover over his shoulder and tell him how to position his fingers so he doesn't slice his fingers off. Bill isn't sure he trusts Robert with a knife either, but it truly is a miracle Robert survived so long.

Sometimes, Robert will make him breakfast like he did that first morning and bring it to him in bed. He'll always watch intensely as Bill eats it, hands trembling under the scrutiny so that most of it ends up on the duvet anyway. Robert just laughs at this and wipes at Bill's mouth with the corner of his shirt.

Sometimes Robert will read what Bill writes. Bill will turn around from the stove or step out of the bath to see Robert sitting at the table with Bill's stories in front of him, eyes roving the page. It makes him uncomfortable but he's not brave enough to ask him to stop. Besides, whenever Robert meets Bill's gaze with a small smile, whenever he ruffles his hair or kisses Bill's mouth tenderly, Bill feels his heart flutter at the praise.

He's losing it.

The moment Bill would really pinpoint as the thing that changed everything, however, is when Robert finds Bill's sketchpad.

Cooped up with nothing to do for so long, Bill's imagination has run a little wild. He finds himself sketching himself, his friends, Robert even. Occasionally they'll be happy and smiling; even Robert has a whole page dedicated to his smile, the snapshot of a memory Bill had deemed important from one time Robert was watching Bill cook. Robert has a strange sort of smile: creepy and unsettling without being overtly unattractive. It throws Bill off without him even realising.

These aren't the drawings that interest Robert, however. Robert seems to be drawn to Bill's darker pictures.

He doesn't have a lot to work with - no colour or paint, so he has to make do with shading - but he tries as best he can. The back pages of his sketchbook or filled with roughly pencilled drawings of Robert in varying states of death and decay, skin melting from his skull, black blood dripping from his mouth. Robert becomes... mesmerised. Bill is

expecting him to be angry. He isn't.

"You're very talented, Billy." He says at first, flicking through the pictures with a pensive expression. The more he sees, the more his hesitance morphs into excitement until he's beaming at Bill's fucked up pictures. It's sickening, even more so in context, and Bill has to hug himself and look away.

"I'm s-sorry." He says automatically, trying to make himself as small as possible. Maybe if he goes back to the bed Robert would be less likely to hurt him physically. Then again, nothing ever seems to stop Robert except himself. Bill, as much as he wishes otherwise, has no influence.

"You don't have to apologise, kiddo." He tells Bill gleefully. "These are very nice."

That, for whatever reason, gets to Bill. He hunches his shoulders and bites the inside of his cheek so hard he tastes coppery blood on his tongue, but it's no he. He feels the first few tears roll down his cheek, damp where his skin already feels overheated. Determined to keep Robert's attention off him he bites down on his knuckle and squeezes his eyes shut, so distracted that he doesn't even notice Robert move until his hands are settling over Bill's shoulders, light and fluttery.

"It's okay, buddy." He murmurs comfortingly, breath ghosting across Bill's face. Robert stoops to rest his chin on Bill's shoulder and wrap his arms around Bill's waist, because when he speaks, his lips brush against the sensitive skin of Bill's neck. He shudders.

"You don't have to be ashamed." Robert continues, body heat seeping through to Bill. "You don't have anything to be embarrassed about."

"They're h-horrible." Bill chokes out, voice thick with tears. He feels weak, like he shouldn't be able to stand up, like the only reason he's still upright is because Robert is rooting him to the spot. He just wants to float away, to just close his eyes and be gone from all of this. He wants to crawl into bed.

"They're beautiful." His hand slides down Bill's side to rest on his hip, rubbing intimate circles into his skin just above the waist pant of his

pants. "You're beautiful. You're like me, buddy."

Bill is shaking his head before Robert even has the words out.

"Nothing wrong with that, Billy." He sounds so sincere, so *hopeful*, that Bill feels bad denying him. "Sometimes things just get a little messy up here," he taps Bill's temple with two fingertips. "And you just... get angry, right? Wanna hurt people? You wanna hurt me, Bill?"

"No!" Bill doesn't know which narrative he wants to play along with anymore. He thinks he'd rather be nice to Robert than be anything like him, but... Robert is right. His head feels so messy, so loud and unstoppable, that he can barely concentrate on what Robert is saying.

"It's okay," Robert says encouragingly. "It's okay if you want to hurt people sometimes. I understand."

Bill doesn't know what he wants anymore. All he knows is that when Robert's hand slips from his waist to between his legs, he's already guilty, sickeningly hard, and he doesn't want Robert to know.

"No!" He cries, shoving Robert backwards and stumbling forwards, almost faceplanting with how violent he was. Bill's heart is thundering and he can hear the blood rushing in his ears behind a torrent of whirling, panicked thoughts.

Why did you do that? Just let him take what he wants. Now he's gonna be mad.

Bill stands silent and still, facing the wall, shoulders hunched still. He can't feel any movement from behind him and the thought of Robert also standing stock still is so uncomfortable that he shivers, but Bill can feel Robert's gaze prickling at the back of his neck like a constant reminder of where he is and what his life is like now. Bill's heavy breathing echoes around this cave that Robert calls a home.

"I think you need to calm down, Billy." Robert's voice is pitched low and even when he speaks, but Bill can hear the irritation underlying his words. He may not be angry enough to grab Bill by the throat and

hold a knife to his skin, but he isn't happy with him either.

Bill turns slowly, dreading what he'll find waiting for him in Robert's expression.

"They're just d-drawings," he says, voice shaking. "They don't mean anything."

"Who are you trying to convince, buddy?" Robert asks. Bill's mouth feels too dry. He wants a drink.

Robert turns around and Bill watches his back as he gets further and further away. He's so distracted by his own messy thoughts that he only realises Robert is planning on leaving when he's halfway gone.

"Wait!" He cries out in a panic. Having Robert around is terrifying but being alone down here is worse; Bill swears he can hear noises, not just the patter of dripping water but the quick staccato of feet hitting the ground, children's laughter. Maybe it's crazy to want Robert with him, but Bill is losing his mind anyway.

Robert half turns, like he's waiting for Bill to make a more persuasive case.

"I'm sorry," Bill starts, wringing his hands nervously. "I didn't mean to upset you. Please don't g-go."

"What would you have me do instead, Billy? I can't always sit around and play, kiddo, I have real work to do." Robert sounds patronising in a way he's never sounded before, even with all his strange nicknames for Bill. Back when Robert was just his friend and their relationship was mostly innocent Bill had never felt condescended to or like Robert was making fun of him. Now, he's picking on Bill for things Robert himself has enforced. It's not fucking *fair*.

Sit over there, Bill thinks pitifully. Sit over there and don't say anything, I just don't want to be alone.

He can't say that, of course. Now that Robert knows he wants something, he's going to have to come up with a better bargain than that, and there isn't much he has to make deals with down here.

There's only one thing he has that Robert might want, and if he's desperate enough he could take it whenever he wants.

"I'll- you can... if you want," Bill trips over his words in his hurry to say them before he chickens out. "I'll- t-touch you. If you want."

Robert cocks his head, fully facing Bill now. His interest has been captured and a smirk plays at the corner of his mouth. Bill has the uncomfortable feeling that he has been played.

"Yeah?" Robert asks casually. "You'll put your hands on me?"

Bill nods as earnestly as he can manage. Robert takes a step closer.

"What if I want your mouth?" He asks, walking forward purposefully until there are only a few centimetres between his feet and Bill's. "What would you do then?"

"W-What?" Bill says, barely above a whisper. Robert's gaze is captivating, so intense that Bill can't blink or look away. Robert smirks, raises his arm and pushes Bill's fringe out of his face. His hand lingers, fingers wrapped around Bill's hair, as he speaks.

"What if I wanted you on your knees with your mouth open, hmm? What then? What if I said I want to fuck your throat until you're choking?"

Bill doesn't have time to procrastinate, and even if he did there would be no point in the end. Every route would lead him back to the same conclusion: either he does this or he spends what feels like an eternity alone in the haunted basement from his nightmares.

Tears are already gathering in his eyes as his gaze lowers and he sinks down slowly to his knees. His vision is blurry but Bill knows that he's at eye level with Robert's crotch now, and when he reaches out tentatively his fingers brush against a zipper. Fumbling, he blinks until he can see what he's doing and unzips Robert's trousers with a dawning sense of dread.

Robert will probably make this hurt. Robert is already hard and he's going to make sure Bill regrets talking back to him, regrets pulling away, acting like he has any control at all.

But then, just as Bill's fingers brush against Robert's erection through the fabric of his underwear, Robert stops him. The hand in Bill's hair squeezes and drags his head backwards until his neck is straining to look up at Robert.

It's demeaning, being down here, petted like a dog, and the worst thing is Robert didn't even make him. Bill is down here because he made that choice. Robert has already made it hurt.

"Good boy," Robert says after a few long seconds, and pats his cheek. "Get up from there. I want to make lunch."

Power, Bill realises, not for the last time, is the only thing that really matters to Robert.

7. Chapter 7

Notes for the Chapter:

Sorry for such a long wait, for some reason I lost motivation to write for a while there. I started this chapter weeks ago and just finished it tonight so it's jumpy and probably confusing, but I hope you enjoy anyway! <3

Bill can safely say that the day he rolls over in bed to find himself lying next to an unconscious Patrick Hockstetter is easily the third worst day of his life.

The first is reserved for the day Georgie went missing, naturally, because nothing could ever match the overwhelming, crushing loss that he'd felt then. Georgie, who had been so young and sweet, who Bill had loved more than anything. Georgie, who Bill had let die.

The second would have to be when he woke up in Neibolt, although that probably stretches over the night he met Robert and the following morning. He'd been so scared and so humiliated, so *betrayed* that Robert, his friend, someone he thought he could trust, had been lying to him the entire time. Losing a loved one has always been one of Bill's biggest fears. It happened with Georgie, and in a way Bill thinks it happened with Robert too.

And now there's this, today, waking up and coming face to face with the boy who has tormented Bill since before he can remember.

Bill doesn't just hate Patrick, he *fears* him. He's become less bothered by his high school bullies since becoming entangled with Robert, that much is true, but Patrick has never been just a run of the mill asshole. There's always been something *off* about him. Bill tries to tamp down on the instinctual feeling of sick satisfaction, but he can't quite convince himself that this isn't a good thing.

Nobody deserves to suffer, Bill thinks, not even Patrick, but there's a little voice inside his head singing *karma*.

There's a rivulet of blood trickling from a dash on his forehead and he looks pretty well unconscious, but Bill still moves slowly for fear of waking him up. Robert thankfully hasn't tucked Patrick under the covers with Bill, but they're still uncomfortably close so Bill swings his legs over the side and stands up on shaky legs. He hasn't even registered the fact that his breathing is encroaching on hyperventilation until he feels a presence behind him and a Robert is cupping his elbow, chest pressed flush to his back.

"I brought you a gift, buddy." Bill can hear the smile in Robert's voice. He's proud. He wants Bill to be proud of him, to be pleased with him, and how will he react when Bill is neither of those things?

"What's g-going on?" Bill breathes, petrified. He's unable to take his eyes off Hockstetter's prone form. He doesn't look like a psychopath when he's unconscious: he just looks like a kid.

"Shh, don't get upset." Robert's laugh is high pitched, more of a giggle than anything Bill has ever heard. It's terrifying.

"I'm not upset," Bill lies. He wants it to be a lie, at least. He's scared, of course, because Robert is acting even more psychotic than usual. He's somewhat manageable when it's just him and Bill alone, because Bill thinks Robert maybe likes him just a little bit, but when they throw someone else into the mix? It's even more terrifying.

So Bill is scared, that much is certain. There's a little part of him, though, however small, that does feel upset, that feels *betrayed* that Robert has done this. It's ridiculous, he knows, but he has almost let himself believe that Robert could be nice. Maybe not a good person, but *nice*.

That's untrue, he realises now. He was an idiot for ever thinking that his presence here alone could prevent Robert from hurting others.

He's been here too long. He needs to get out of here before he loses his mind any more than he already has.

"This is him, right?" Robert continues, fingers brushing tantalisingly over the shell of Bill's war. "The boy that was mean to you? I got the right one?"

Bill can only nod, frozen, sick with guilt now that he knows it really is his fault Patrick is here. He remembers talking to Robert, back when they were still friends and Bill was still ignorant, about how Henry and Patrick would bully him and his friends. Robert would make sympathetic noises and say things like ‘they’ll get what’s coming to them, Billy.’ Bill had dismissed it as an awkward knee jerk response. That, clearly, was a mistake.

“That’s a relief.” Robert steps away, circling around the bed until he stands above Patrick, watching him with a cold, assessing look. Bill shudders. He wonders if Robert has ever stood above him like that whilst he was asleep. Once again, his utter vulnerability strikes him and he’s left feeling cold and helpless. He’s topless and hugging himself to bear the cold.

“What are you going to d-do?” Bill speaks these words out loud because he doesn’t want Robert to know how afraid he is, but his voice trembles halfway through and the sentiment is forgotten. Robert looks up at him and his lips quirk upwards in a slick smile.

“What do *you* want to do?” The question isn’t really out of character for Robert, but Bill is still thrown for a loop. “I did consider bringing one of your friends down here,” he continues, and Bill’s blood turns to ice. “You know, the Trashmouth one? Or maybe the girl everyone seems so fond of? I couldn’t decide.”

He could have done. Robert could easily have brought Beverly or Richie or any of the down here. He could have killed them up there and Bill would never have known. In a way, Bill feels a strange rush of gratitude towards Robert for at least choosing to kidnap the person who, out of the whole of Derry, probably deserves it the most.

“Please d-don’t hurt my friends.” He remembers, the first morning with Robert when he’d brought up this same topic, Bill had threatened to kill him. Now the idea of threatening Robert seems as ridiculous as threatening Patrick Hockstetter. It wouldn’t change anything.

“We don’t have to,” Robert says, pointing at Hockstetter like he solves all their problems. “Haven’t you ever wanted to get revenge, buddy? Show the bullies what you can do?”

Bill doesn't respond, because of course he has, all of them have, but that doesn't mean he wants to *kill* them. Then how would he be any better than them?

"Think about it, kiddo." Robert tells him, ruffling Bill's hair on his way past. Bill stands deadly still as Robert walks past him, last words lingering in the air between them. "I know you'll make the right choice."

It only occurs to Bill once he's alone that Robert might be getting complacent. If he'd turned around just then, he would have seen which tunnel Robert took.

Bill is sitting still and silent, too nervous to draw, by the time Hockstetter wakes up. He hasn't moved more than a few inches since Robert left and he doesn't know what to fear more: Robert returning or being on his own with the school's resident psychopath. Should he try and team up with Patrick or try and get away from him?

If Patrick stays, he'll die, Bill is certain.

He wakes slowly, eyes squeezing tight as his hand flies to the gash on his forehead. Bill's fingers curl around the edge of his sketchbook where it's resting in his lap. He makes a sleepy, pained noise before his eyes flutter open and he looks directly at Bill.

"Denbrough?" He asks disbelievingly, before he's even sat up. He's in their bed, Bill thinks - wonders when he started calling it *their* bed - and the thought of having to sleep in that bed night after night for the foreseeable future makes his stomach churn with sickening dread.

"Patrick," Bill whispers in reply, standing up and advancing slowly. Robert supposedly isn't here but Bill feels like he's being watched always, like Robert could be hiding down any one of these tunnels, waiting for him to make a wrong move.

"What the fuck?" Patrick swings himself out of bed with too much force and staggers a little, wincing at what must be a painful concussion. Bill's heart pounds; he's afraid of Patrick and he's afraid

of Robert, but most of all he's afraid of dying down here, rotting down here, all alone. The thought that none of his friends will ever know what really happened to him terrifies Bill.

"Don't—" Bill starts, holding up his hands placatingly. "You got hit really h-hard. You could f-fall."

Patrick narrows his eyes at Bill before cursing loudly and spitting off to the side. "Fuck," he complains, oddly calm for the situation. "I can't believe I'd get taken by the same kid fucker that took you."

Bill shudders. Patrick doesn't know, he can't know, but that strikes a little close to home.

"Robert— he's gonna c-come back soon. I d-don't know what he's gonna do." That's a lie. Of course Bill knows. What else would Robert do?

Patrick rolls his eyes, stumbling over the uneven ground towards one of the tunnels. Bill follows uncertainly, conscious of how loud their footsteps are in the echoing silence.

"What are you d-doing, Hockstetter?" Bill hates how much he sounds like a needy child, following people around. He can't escape it: not with Robert, not with Patrick. "Where are you gonna g-go?"

"You think I'm gonna wait around here to get ass raped by a pedo, Stutters?" Patrick sneers. He doesn't seem afraid but then Patrick has never seemed to be afraid of anything. Maybe, Bill thinks, he just doesn't realise the extent of the danger he's in.

"He k-killed Georgie," Bill tells someone, for the first time. He wishes it felt cathartic. "He killed my b-brother."

Patrick pauses for the first time, hesitating at the entrance of one of the tunnels like he's debating whether or not to venture down there.

"Yeah, well," he says eventually. "Don't go crying about it, B-B-Billy."

It's better than slamming his head against a wall and kicking him to death, Bill figures, but it still fills him with an inescapable sense of

fury.

“He’ll k-k-kill you if he catches you.” Bill wonders when ‘us’ became ‘you’, because he’s sure Robert will make him regret it if he catches either of them.

“Sure,” Patrick responds, mouth curled up in a sneer like he doesn’t believe Bill. Bill is torn. He doesn’t want to be alone with Patrick, and Robert did say that Bill would die in the tunnels, lost and alone and starving to death long before anyone could find him, if he tried to escape. But then, how can he just choose to stay here whilst Patrick is escaping barely five minutes since he woke up? Bill has already been made into a coward, but he can’t make it worse for himself.

“I think this is a m-mistake.” Bill tells Patrick, voice small and worries. Patrick has already chosen a tunnel at random and they’re halfway down it, but if Bill looks back he can still see the glowing light from the opening. He could still go back if he wanted—

Patrick turns the corner. So does Bill.

“Shut up, will you? Or I’ll kill you myself.” Patrick doesn’t raise his voice, doesn’t sound anything other than mildly frustrated, like this is all a big inconvenience, but Bill believes him wholeheartedly. He shuts his mouth.

There’s an eerie dripping sound in front of them and Bill’s bare feet cut through the water. Robert must have taken them down to the sewers; Bill doesn’t want to think about what he might be stepping on.

They walk for a while in silence. It would be comforting if Bill didn’t face the same danger with Patrick that he did with Robert, but all the same, Bill would never have even tried to escape without Hockstetter so he guesses he owes him that.

Even though he thinks he might be making a terrible mistake, even though they’re probably going to starve to death here, even though Robert will probably find them both and when he does...

A sudden noise from behind them startles Bill and he whips around in

shock, eyes searching the tunnel. Patrick turns slowly, leisurely, and Bill doesn't know whether he saw the same shadow that Bill did. His heart pounds, terror and adrenaline a swirling cocktail that makes him dizzy.

“P-Patrick—” Before Bill can say anything else, something grabs his ankle and jerks forward quickly. The world spins and Bill scrapes the flesh of his palm as he throws his hand out, grazing it across the wall of the tunnel as he tries to catch himself. His head strikes against the ground and his ears ring, his vision whiting out. Dirty water rushes over his face, getting in his nose and mouth when he struggles to breathe.

The last thing he remembers before he sinks backwards under the water is a scream. Patrick Hockstetter's scream. Bill never thought he'd see the day.

For the second time today, Bill wakes to see Patrick Hockstetter's face far too close to his own. This time, however, Bill's head is throbbing, and Patrick is dead.

Bill realises this only after a few moments of groaning and groggy blinking, his vision blurred. He must have really cracked his head open against the floor when he fell earlier.

When he was pulled, he corrects himself. He didn't fall. Robert pulled him over.

Then he focuses on the imagine in front of him and he screams. Patrick's throat has been slit and his eyes are wide open, frozen in the kind of terror Bill didn't think people like Patrick could feel. There are bruises on his face and wrists, when Bill scrambled backwards and looks down at him, and blood is pooling around him: deep, vicious red.

There's blood on his face— Patrick's blood. What did Robert do whilst he was unconscious?

“You shouldn't have run away,” Robert speaks from behind him.

Bill's instinctual reaction is to curl in on himself, because Robert is right. There's nowhere for him to run to. He lets out a shuddering breath, wrapping his arms around himself, tears clouding his vision.

"I've tried to be nice, haven't I?" Robert continues. His voice is steady, curious, nothing like the anger Bill had imagined. It doesn't make it any better.

"I've tried to make this good for you. I bought you gifts. You always have food. You have a soft bed. I make you come. I even let you walk around free, Billy. Don't you appreciate that?"

"I'm gonna throw up," Bill whispers, hands shaking. He really does think so as well, really does feel like he's physically responding to the scene in front of him. Is this what Robert did to Georgie? Is this what's going to happen to him?

"Do you know why I did all that, buddy?" Robert acts like Bill never spoke at all. At Bill's tentatively shaking head, he says, "I did it because I want you to be happy. I *brought* you here so that you'd be happy. And you repay me by running away with a boy who was always mean to you? I really did think better of you, Bill."

Bill wants to cry. He wants to throw up and yell at Robert and apologise, wants to fall into Robert's arms and just be held.

"I'm sorry," Bill whispers, digging his nails into his arms. "I t-told him we shouldn't."

Robert makes a disinterested noise and it hits Bill like a punch to the stomach. It reminds him vividly of his parents. Does he miss them? He isn't sure.

"But you did."

I d-didn't *want* to." Bill argues, voice cracking. He feels, for some reason, that it's vital Robert understands him; he *didn't* want to try to escape. Not really— he only went with Patrick so he wouldn't be alone. Right?

Robert is silent for long enough to have Bill fidgeting in discomfort. He finds himself unable to look away from Patrick, hoping

irrationally that he will wake up and look around and threaten to beat Bill up.

Robert moves whilst Bill is still frozen, transfixed by Patrick's unmoving body. He lies, still and silent, with a dark pool gathering around his head like a halo. Bill's face is sticky with Patrick's blood, and so are Robert's hands when they slide down his bare arms and settle on his hip bones. Bill wants to protest, but seeing Hockstetter's slit throat like that brings him back to reality with painful, shuddering clarity.

He'd let himself get so accustomed to life here, life with Robert, that he'd almost tricked himself into thinking he was safe. He isn't. Robert isn't his friend, isn't his boyfriend: Robert is the man who murdered Georgie and Betty Ripsom and countless other children all over Derry. Robert is the man who deliberately befriended the brother of his victim just to fuck with his head.

Bill thinks he's been pretty successful at that so far.

He doesn't try and stop Robert when the man tugs his pyjama bottoms down and at the gentle pressure from Robert's hands he steps out of them, standing fully naked and shivering in front of a dead body and a serial killer. Robert kicks the trousers away from them and leans over. His hair tickles Bill's cheek as Robert inhales, lips trailing up his neck. Bill clenches his teeth, tears slipping down his cheek.

"You're so beautiful like this, buddy." Robert whispers, rubbing Hockstetter's blood into his skin. "My little psychopath."

There's nothing he can do but comply when Robert's fingers pry their way past his lips and press down on his tongue. He chokes a little when they go too deep but this doesn't seem to register with Robert. Bill supposes he should be grateful he's getting any kind of lubrication at all.

Robert's fingers taste like blood and Bill gags again, just from the metallic tang. When Robert withdraws his fingers and presses one against Bill's hole, sliding it in up to the second knuckle, it's slick with saliva and blood. Bill swallows past the lump in his throat but

doesn't try to stop the tears.

Robert is going to take him like this: on his back, with Bill's legs wrapped around his waist, probably looking into each others' eyes. It couldn't be more intimate. That's what really stings.

Bill barely registers what's happening to his body until Robert's fingers brushes against something inside him that makes his mind blank like white noise. His toes curl against the bed and his hips jerk upwards, cock hardening against his thigh. Robert looks up at him from where he's settled in between Bill's legs and grins.

"There you go, buddy." He says, breath ghosting over Bill's cock. His fingers hit that spot again, two of them now, curling upwards and rubbing into it again and again. Bill lets out a shaky, high pitched moan.

"Yeah, that's right, kiddo." Robert continues, leading up to place a quick, chaste kiss on the tip of Bill's dick. When he pulls away his lips are shiny, smeared with precome. "That feels nice, doesn't it? I'm gonna make you feel real nice. Is this what you wanted, when you first met me? When we first hung out? You looked so sweet, I couldn't wait to take your virginity."

Bill pants breathlessly as his mouth hangs open. How much more is Robert going to take from him?

"You should have stayed," Robert tells him gruffly. "We could have killed him together."

When Robert pushes inside, Bill lets the tears fall. He needs to protect his friends and what little family remains, yes, but other than that Bill really doesn't have much to lose. Robert has taken his pride, his courage, his independence. When Bill cups a hand around the back of Robert's neck and pulls him into a kiss, he knows that he can never come back from this. How can he hate this and crave it at the same time?

It hurts, but Robert seems to enjoy the pained whimpers Bill makes any time Robert thrusts particularly hard. Bill's nails scratch lines down Robert's back under his t-shirt. His cock is still hard between

them but Robert doesn't make any move to touch it, just fucks into Bill deep and slow and maddening.

Bill comes before Robert, crying and trembling as Robert fucks him through it. When Robert comes inside Bill, he rests a hand over his throat and leans down to hiss into Bill's face, "You'll never run from me again."

Fuck, Bill thinks. He'll kill me before I can try.

Notes for the Chapter:

I've been obsessed with IT rare pairs lately so if you have any ship prompts let me know! <3

Author's Note:

let me know what you think of this mess <3